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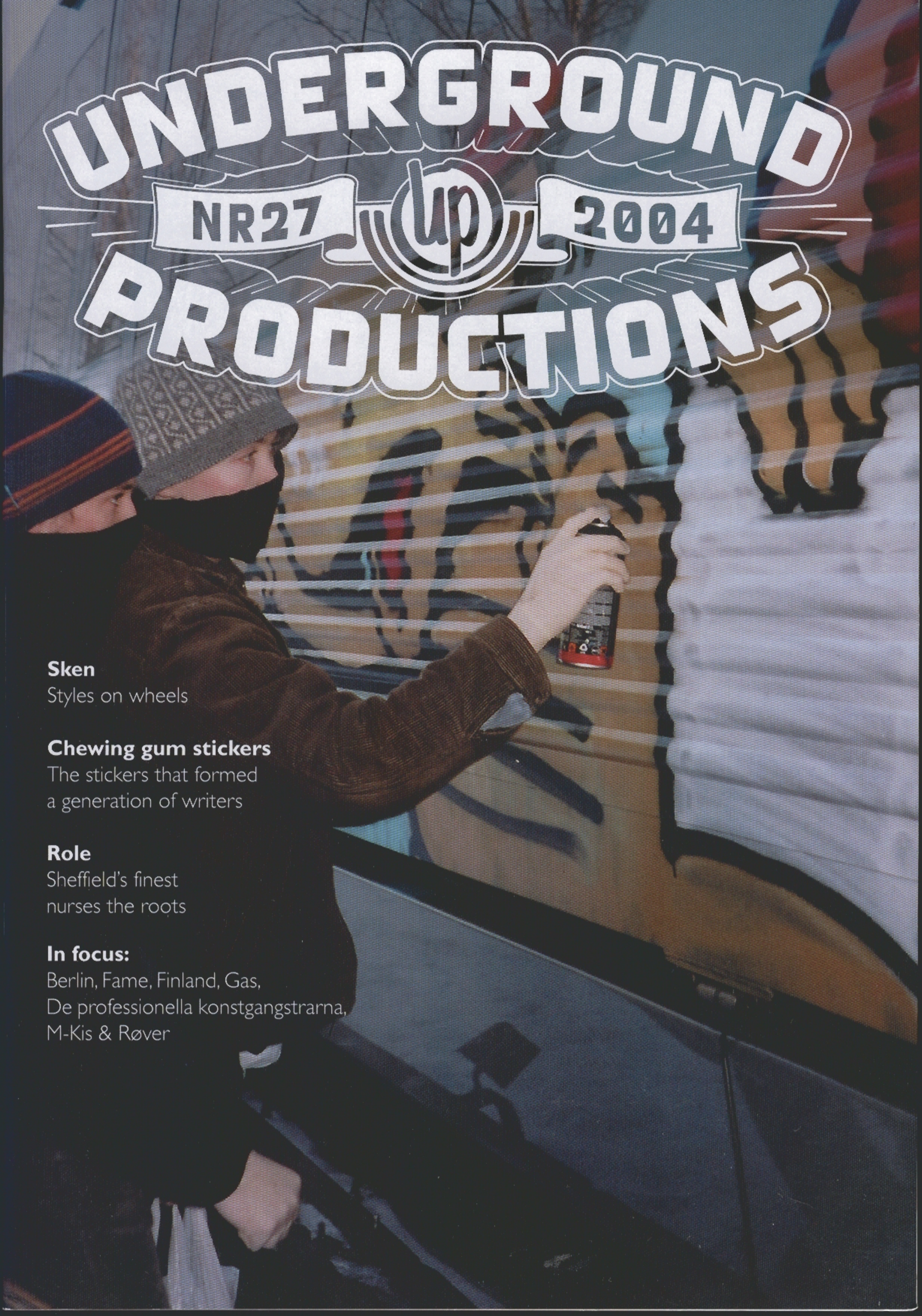

UNDERGROUND PRODUCTIONS

NR27 2004

Sken
Styles on wheels

Chewing gum stickers
The stickers that formed
a generation of writers

Role
Sheffield's finest
nurses the roots

In focus:
Berlin, Fame, Finland, Gas,
De professionella konstgangstrarna,
M-Kis & Røver

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UP 27 – May 2004

Summer in Sweden

Summer is coming to the northern hemisphere; the further north you travel, the lighter it gets and the shorter the nights. Summer is the time of great festivals. The graffiti scene, too, has its own festivals.

In June, Gothenburg will be hosting several large festivals. On June 7, the Everwanting Streets exhibition opens with **Akim**, **Zast** and **Point** at Komettorget in Bergsjö. It will be inaugurated at Röda Sten and Bergsjö on June 12 and carries on until August. Participants are **Zevs**, **Swoon**, **Pike & Nug**, Akim, Zast, Point, **Bates**, **Moa**, **Cp**, **Rea**, **Lups**, **Mr Mucho**, **Viagrafik**, **Miss Van**, **HuskMitNavn**, **Finsta** and many others.

Between June 14 and 15, a conference titled Outside In, on public space, will be held in Gothenburg.

The graffitifests Meeting of Styles and Write for Gold will be held at Röda Sten on the 18th and 19th of June respectively.

On June 5, in Umeå, just south of the polar circle and the midnight sun, the inaugural party for Umeå's legal wall will be held. The party, which is free, is dubbed Rumble in the Jungle and will boast several accomplished graffiti writers and reggae and hip-hop bands. It begins at 1.00 pm and ends at 2.00 am.

The next issue of UP will appear in early autumn.

The UP editorial team wishes you all a pleasant summer!

More information:
Everwanting Streets: www.hiphop.nu/es
www.outsidein.se.
www.meetingofstyles.com
www.write4gold.com
Rumble in the Jungle: www.hiphop.nu/temp/affisch.jpg

The men's room at a bar in London. Photo by Role who you can read about on page 16.

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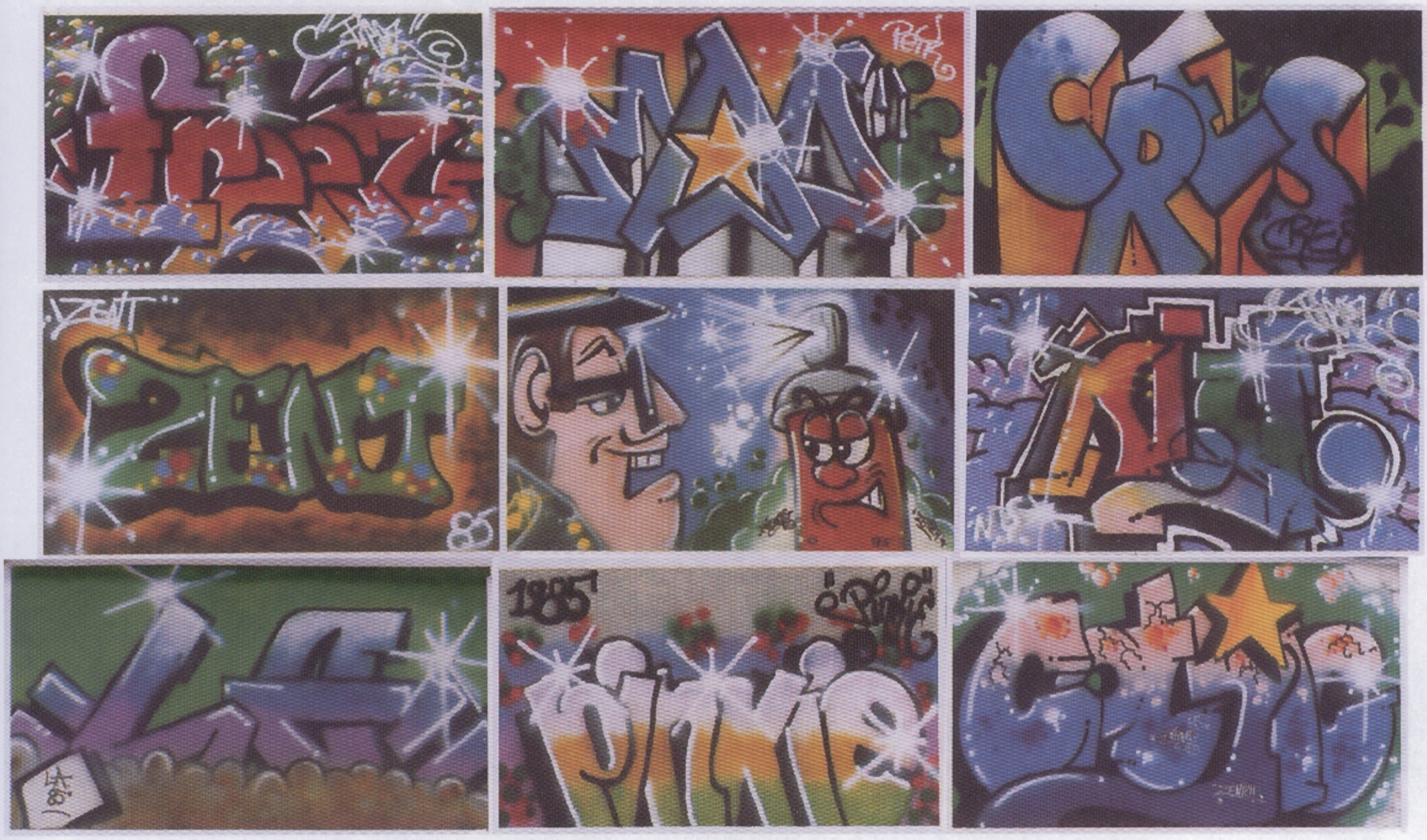
WEACTIVIST TIMBUKTU
Style to the bone spring 2004.

WE/JL



The stickers are shown in natural size. All of them come from Swet's collection.

"The stickers spread like wildfire"

In the spring of 1985, some fifteen Copenhagen graffiti writers went to the roof of a tall building and painted letters and characters on plywood boards. Later that year, the pictures appeared as stickers in chewing gum packages in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. For several years, writers held on to these cards, which had been the first point of contact with graffiti for many of them.

The graffiti cards were the first pieces I'd seen printed on paper. It was the first time I could observe graffiti at close range. I was fascinated by the highlights and fades. I tried to copy them, but it was impossible to achieve the same effect with colored pens. Others also tried copying the images. One of the most popular images was a walking spray can.

After a while, they weren't as interesting any more. I discovered where to find real pieces, and then I discovered Subway Art. But the cards continued to inspire new generations of writers, up to the 1990s.

Many older writers become nostalgic when they talk about the cards, but few of them have any left. There may no longer be a complete collection.

"**Zenith** arranged the job with **Dandy**, the chewing gum company," says **Cres**, the man behind the walking spray can. "She was one of the few female writers in Copenhagen, and something of a diplomat."

For many of the participating writers were bitter rivals. Crime Crew, consisting of **Freez**, **Chaka** and **Pinkie**, and Whap Gang, consisting of **Kyle**, **Rush**, **Goofy** and Cres, were constantly battling. Despite this, the sticker designs were all painted at the same time.

"The scene wasn't that big," says Cres. "Whap Gang and Crime Crew were obvious contenders. So were City Roi (Zenith, **Gubs**, **Reakes**) and individual writers, like **Sketch**." Also participating were **Dimmer** and **Rus**.

The originals were painted on plywood boards measuring four ft four by six ft six.

"We were at Zenith's workplace, a tall building in Holte. It was one of the first legal jobs ever. The surfaces were really too small. We were given the cans – Quick, Ultracolor and Dupli. Legal jobs were really taboo – there was no prestige in them. It was frustrating! But it was a challenge, too.

This was actually the first time I painted in broad daylight, taking my time, thinking about what I wanted to do and creating in peace. I was well-prepared, having brought a sketch of course."

The images were painted in early 1985, and the stickers appeared a few months later. Cres says he can't recall whether he was paid or not, but thinks that payment was probably per item. They were never given any chewing gum, but he thinks that quite a few cans probably vanished.

"We probably thought scoring cans was of greater import than Dandy's ambitions."

All the images that were painted were printed. The writers did a different amount each. Cres himself did four, and says that he probably did the most.

The stickers were included with a brand of gum named Graffiti. It can be supposed that the company was trying to lure kids into buying more gum than they really wanted. One of those who were definitely attracted by the cards was the Danish writer Swet:

"I was on holiday, and spent all my pocket money on gum. I wanted them all, and they are still part of my graffiti collection."

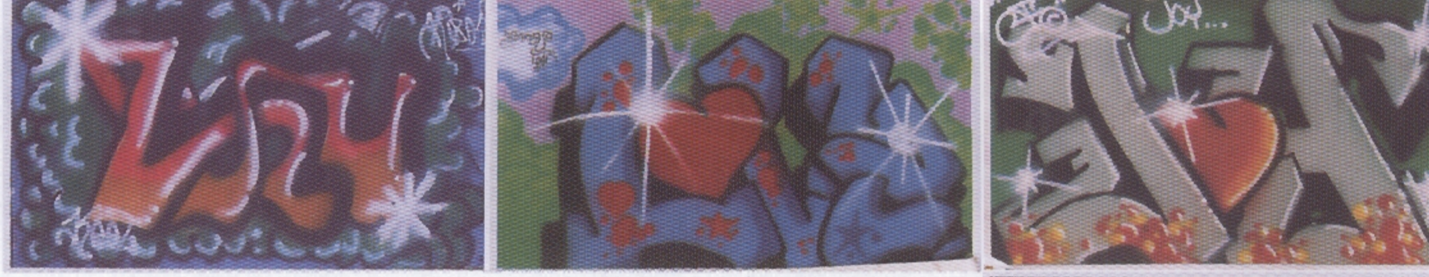
Swet thought the pieces were fantastic.

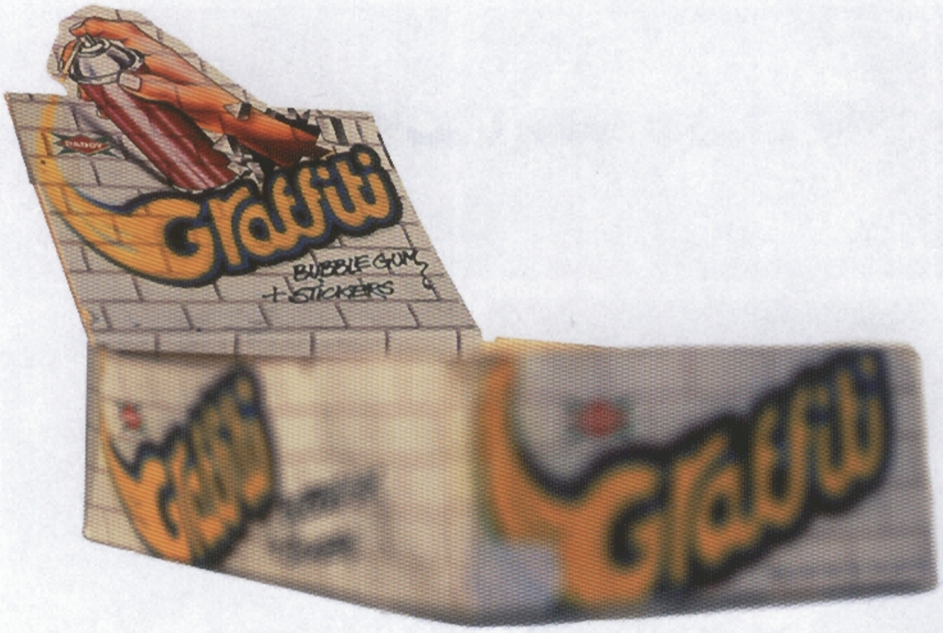
"In those days, everything seemed new! There was a world of graffiti to be explored."

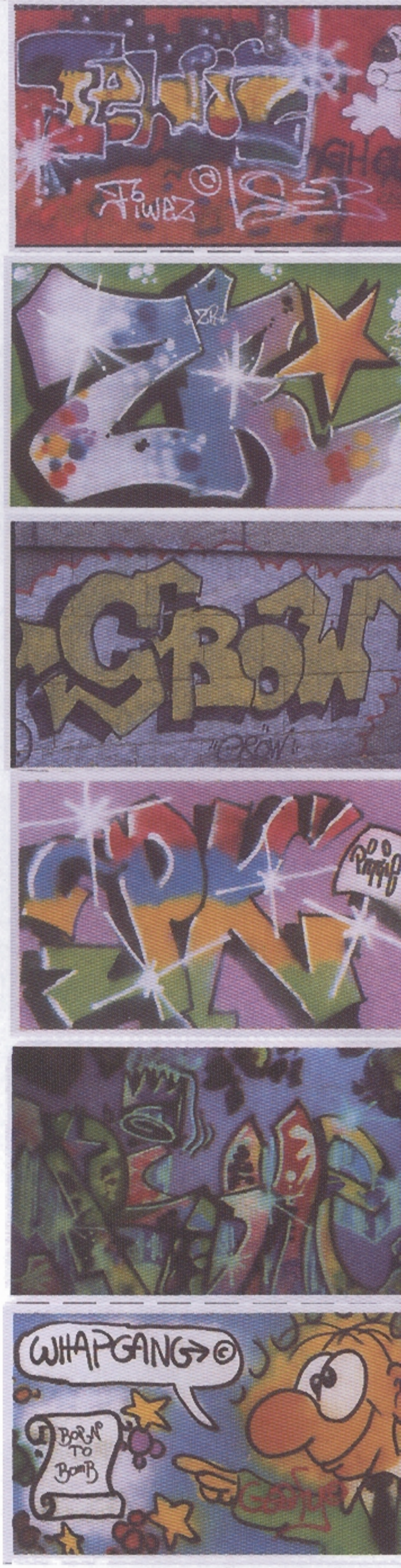
Swet says that the stickers influenced the Danish graffiti scene a lot, since graffiti magazines and the Internet weren't available then.

He thinks Dandy made an important contribution into spreading graffiti. Graffiti only appeared along railway lines or on trains then.

"There were a lot of motifs on the stickers that I'd never seen before, but which I've later







seen in other places, and thought: 'Aha! So that's where that came from!'"

In the fall of 1985, **Dwane** was a budding new Gothenburg writer:

"They were completely cool. A fantastic new pictorial world opened up. There weren't many pieces around then, and the stickers spread like wildfire.

Did the stickers have a lot of influence on Gothenburg writers?

"Yes, they had a lot of influence. Since that Danish book [Danish Wildstyle Graffiti] appeared, we were stupidly influenced. They still write so impeccably and professionally. Some of the motifs weren't that good, and it was nice to feel a bit superior."

Meantime, in Stockholm, **Akay** discovered he was in luck, because his friend's father worked at Stimorol, the company that distributed Graffiti gum in Sweden.

"His father had a stock of gum in his closet, so we'd get big boxes out. At first we ate the gum, then we just opened the packages and threw everything away except the sticker."

On the box was a picture of hundreds of different stickers, and Akay never found some of them, regardless of how many packages he opened.

"I got quite hysterical, because I had thirty copies of some of them."

However, Akay was never really inspired by the stickers.

"There was something not right about them. I probably didn't understand that these things had been painted legally. There was something fake about them, a bit too perfect."

Stockholm subway writer **Tier** was nine years old in the fall of 1985.

"**Phily** appeared with them. Then I found out where to buy them, so I'd stock up once in a while. And people in school had them. You'd spend your time copying them."

Where was the fun in that?

"That's where you got graffiti from, that was how it was supposed to look. It wasn't so important to do something of your own when you copied them. Your sketch was your own anyway. Everybody made those sketches back then, even the kids who didn't write outdoors; all kids collected the stickers and had a tag."

In Oslo, **Pay 2** had already been writing for a year when the cards appeared.

"I think I probably had all of them! I collected the ones I could get hold of. Later I gave them away."

Pay 2 doesn't think the cards had much influence on the Norwegian graffiti scene.

"Maybe among the toys. The ones who were just starting out were interested in them. I liked one Freez piece, but I'd already got further. I probably copied **Dondi** and **Seen** more."

The cards only reached Finland much later, and then only sparsely. By the time **Egs** first saw them, they were too old to be of interest.

"People would get hold of them when they visited Sweden, but that was already in 1987, and other styles were fashionable by then."

Tobias Barenthin Lindblad

DDZ

RAP

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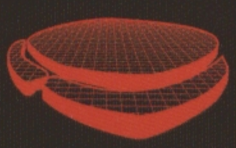

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AND SHINES INTO
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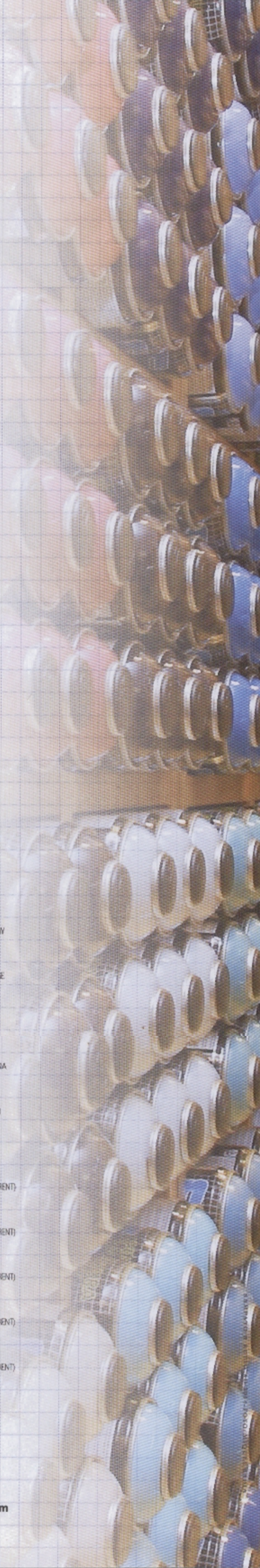
RV20	PARTY YELLOW	RV83	ALEXANDRIA PINK	RV60	KRYPTON GREEN
R1021	LIGHT YELLOW	RV82	ADDICT PINK	RV61	MINGUS GREEN
R1028	MEDIUM YELLOW	RV81	RESISTANCE PINK	RV62	ATREIDES GREEN
RV50	SOLAR ORANGE	RV80	SYRUP PINK	RV63	TASMANIA GREEN
RV46	CORAL ORANGE	RV54	WOODSTOCK VIOLET	RV75	NOSTROMO BLUE
R3020	LIGHT RED	RV53	ISTAMBUL VIOLET	RV76	ABYSS GREEN
RV47	CLANDESTINE RED	RV52	KARMA VIOLET	RV77	NIGHT RED
RV48	REPLICANT RED	RV51	REPUBLIC VIOLET	RV78	METROPOLIS GREY
R3007	CHEROKEE RED	RV27	VAMPIRE VIOLET		
RV85	BERLIN PINK	RV73	AURORA BLUE	R9010	CREAM WHITE
RV64	RESPECT PINK	RV13	HIMALAYA BLUE	RV43	MORDOR GREY
RV65	SPICE RED	RV72	CRYOGENIC BLUE	RV44	GARGOYLE GREY
RV66	TERRACOTA RED	RV71	NIRVANA BLUE	RV45	CAPSULE GREY
RV35	CHOCOLATE BROWN	RV70	PLASMA BLUE	R9011	BLACK
RV42	REGINA BROWN	RV74	COSTA BRAVA BLUE		FLUORESCENT YELLOW
RV41	NATIVE BROWN	RV23	MONACO BLUE		FLUORESCENT ORANGE
RV40	NAZGUL BROWN	RV38	MARSEILLE BLUE		FLUORESCENT RED
RV39	RIPLEY BROWN	RV37	FREMEN BLUE		FLUORESCENT FUCHSIA
R8025	MUD	RV32	LEWIS BLUE		FLUORESCENT GREEN
RV58	ARRAKIS BEIGE	RV69	DREAM BLUE	ESPECTRO (TRANSPARENT)	AIR WHITE
RV57	CITY BEIGE	RV68	HOPE BLUE	ESPECTRO (TRANSPARENT)	ETHEREAL YELLOW
RV56	PLACEBO BEIGE	RV67	CASSIOPEA BLUE	ESPECTRO (TRANSPARENT)	SOUL RED
RV55	ARKALIS BEIGE	R5002	ULTRAMARINE BLUE	ESPECTRO (TRANSPARENT)	ATMOSPHERE BLUE
RV19	FLESH	R5013	NAVY BLUE	ESPECTRO (TRANSPARENT)	SHADOW BLACK



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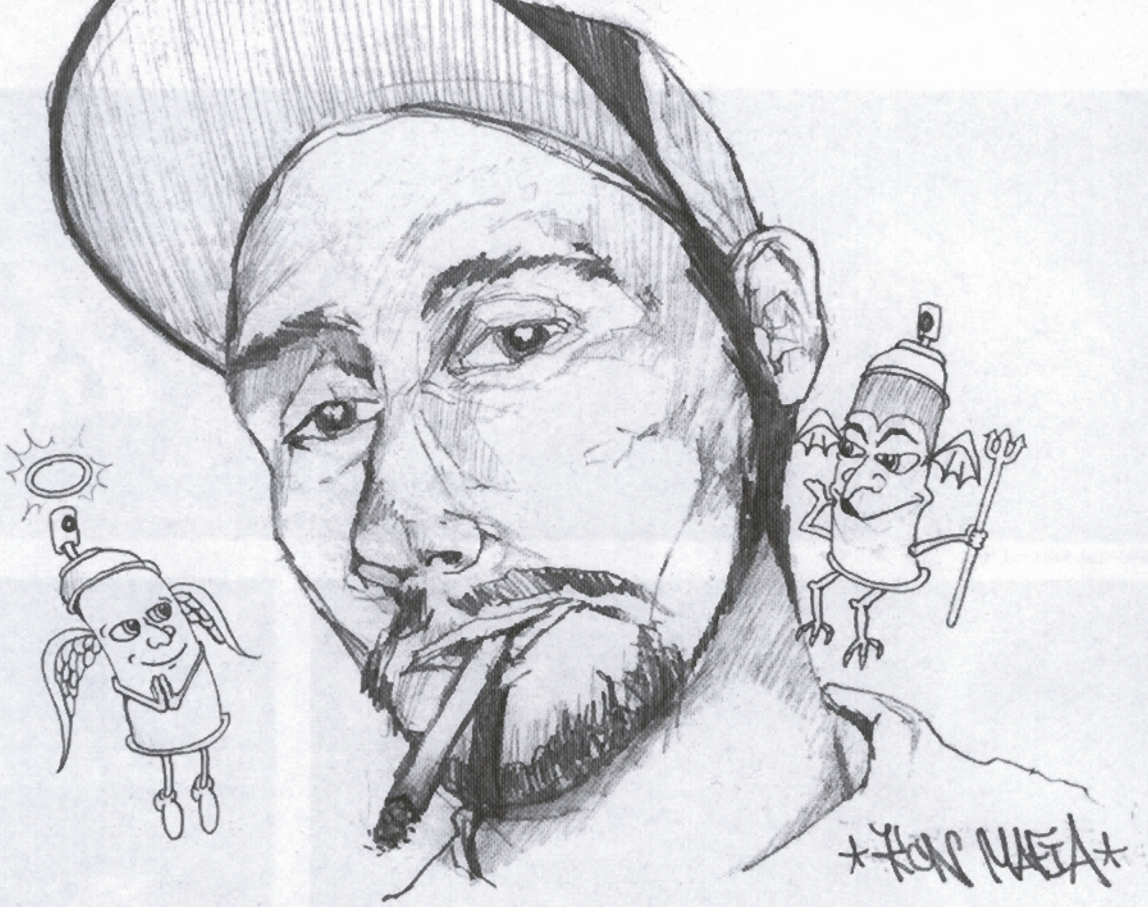


Self portrait by Sken

"Style is everything"

Three years ago, the Stockholm writer Sken was badly injured in a lay-up and was confined to a wheelchair. After much therapy, he's back in the graffiti game, and bombs from his chair.

It is an autumn night 2001. Sken leaves a party in north Stockholm to check out a lay-up nearby. It is about 1.30 in the morning. The autumnal air is cold and damp in the fog. Sken makes his way into the lay-up and climbs up between two train cars to see better. Accidentally, he steps on a cable connecting the two cars. Current shoots out like a bolt of light, in through Sken's left foot, spreading through his skull as it exits. He falls unconscious on the tracks by the train. In the fall, he breaks both his neck and his back. When he wakes up, Sken cannot move.

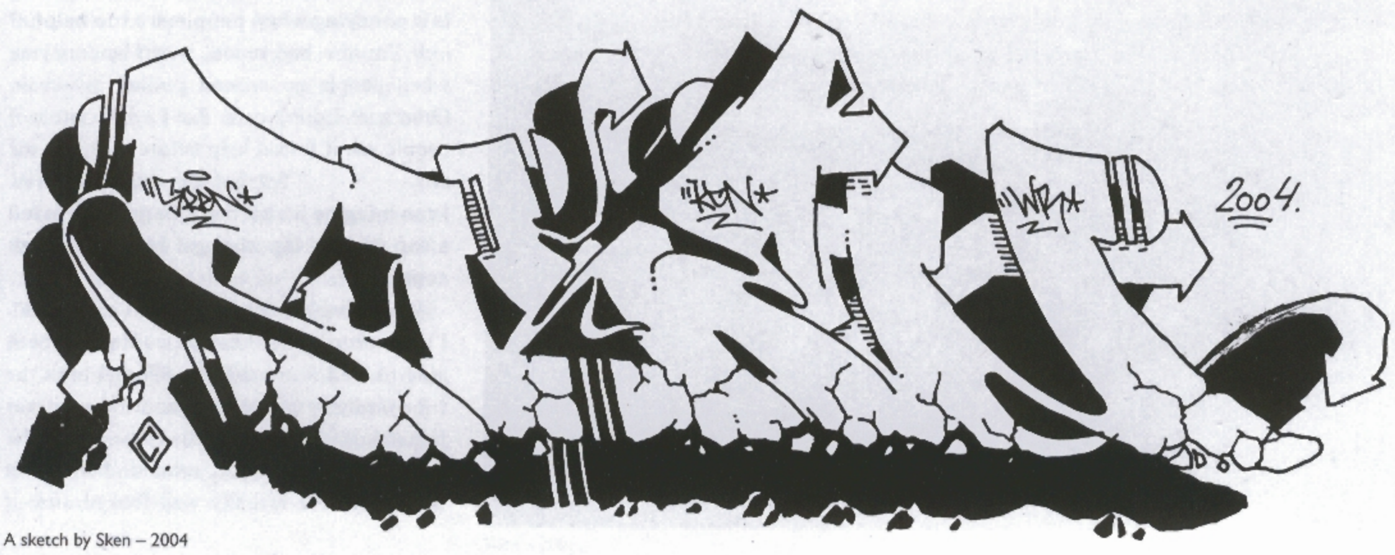
"I didn't understand what had happened. There was no pain: it just felt weird and smelled burnt. I couldn't move, but I could see I was all bloody. I just thought that if a train came at that point, I wouldn't have had time to notice it."

It was only at five o'clock in the morning that a train driver heard his calls for help. When Sken arrived at the Karolinska hospital, he had second-degree burns over most of his body. He was also freezing from having lain on the cold tracks for more than three hours.

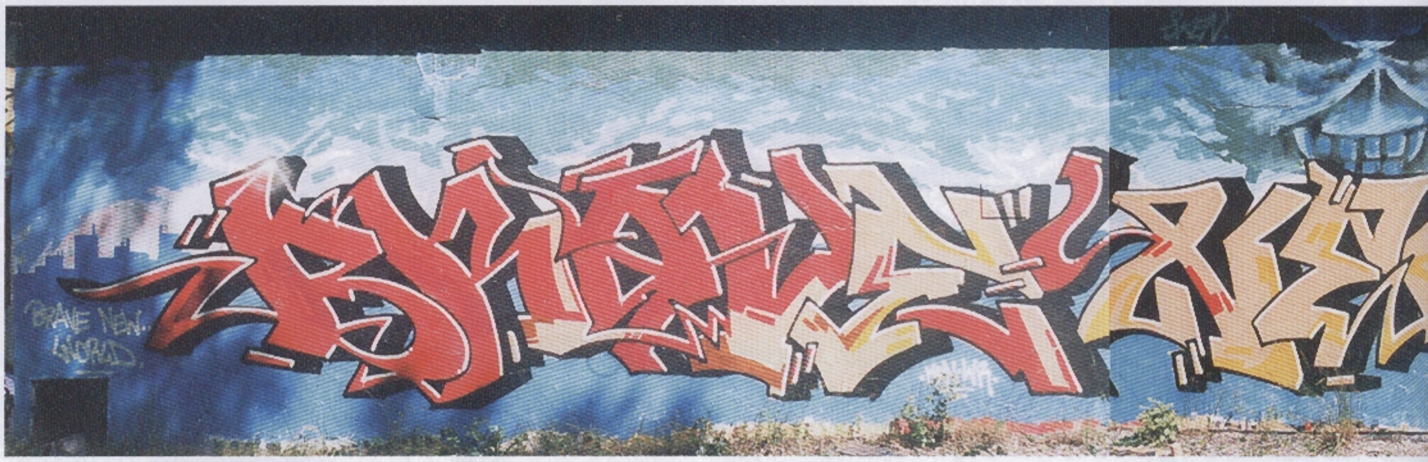
"Nobody could tell how extensive my paralysis would be. I was placed in a respirator because I found it hard to breathe once they had filled me with painkillers. On the same day, they inserted metal pins to support my back and neck."

Sken slept for five days. When he awoke, he had to stay in a respirator for a few more days. He was moved from the operation ward to the burns unit, where he spent a month and a half. Then he was moved to the neurological ward.

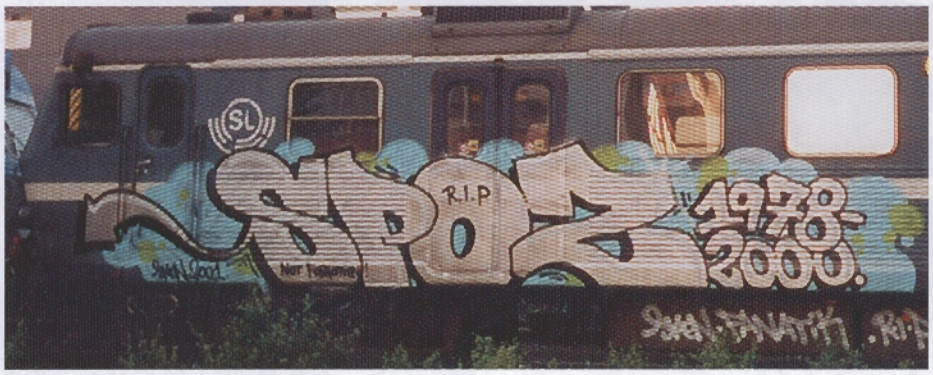
"I had to wear a neck brace for five months, and a corset, a damn steel thing covering my whole midriff. It was so tough. I couldn't move at all, since my body was so stiff. Then I



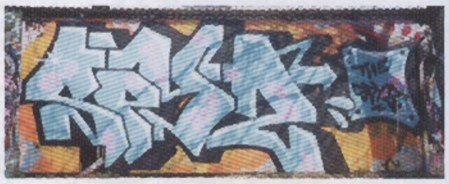
A sketch by Sken – 2004



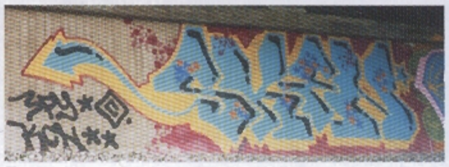
Brave New World by Relic and Sken – 2000



RIP Spoz – 2001



Spyz – 2001



Sken

thought, 'fuck, am I going to lie here like some damn vegetable and need help with everything all my life?' But it's been getting better ever since, and now I manage on my own."

When he left hospital, he was given precedence in the housing queue and now lives in a two-room apartment with his girlfriend. He has also continued working, though he has decreased it to part time. But he is paralysed from the chest down and is dependent on his wheelchair. He misses soccer and skateboarding, but plans to start archery instead.

About six months after the accident, he started writing again.

"We did a pedestrian tunnel in the west suburbs. The lines were pretty shaky, but it was nice to know it still worked. I have a pretty poor sense of balance since I only have muscles from the chest up, but now I feel my can-control has improved. It's really a pretty dumb thing to do if you're in a wheelchair. If there's any trouble, you're a sitting duck and they get a good description of you. I can't just run away and jump over a fence."

Why do you carry on writing despite your paralysis?

Why not? It's a nice feeling when you've finished a piece. I like the atmosphere. I can't sit around at home all day just because I'm in a wheelchair. I want to do something creative. And graffiti is about as creative as it gets. It requires so much time, energy and planning.

How has your daily life changed since the accident?

I don't think about being in a wheelchair anymore. But I did at first. I thought about everything. If I had to go somewhere, I'd worry and check in advance if it would work. Now I don't care. If a problem arises, I'll cross that bridge when I get to it. Most things work, as long as you have the will and the energy and aren't too proud to ask for help. I didn't want to ask anyone for help at first, because I wanted to prove to myself, and others, that I could manage. Now I don't care. Sweden is so well adapted for disabled that I can get anywhere, really. I've started taking the commuter train to work now. It's fun, because it's been such a long time.

"Graffiti is really a pretty dumb thing to do if you're in a wheelchair."

Do you think people view you differently?

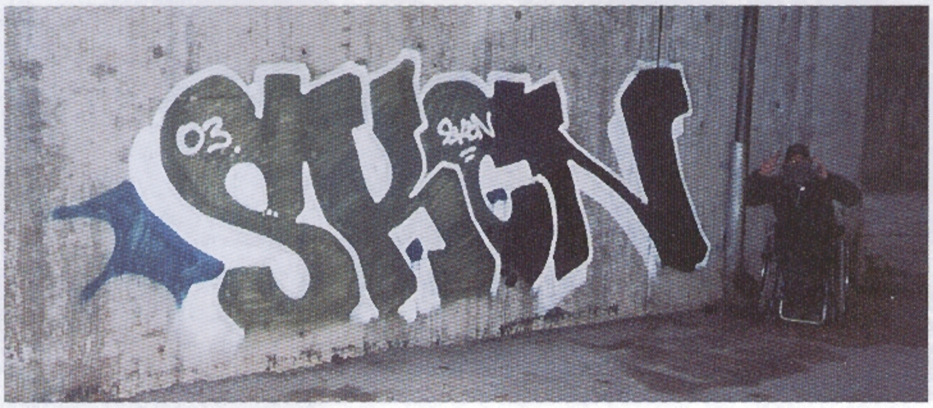
Kids look a bit more, and ask you why you're in a chair. A lot of people think you need more help than you do. Then it's fun to surprise people before they can even help me.

Is it annoying when people are too helpful?

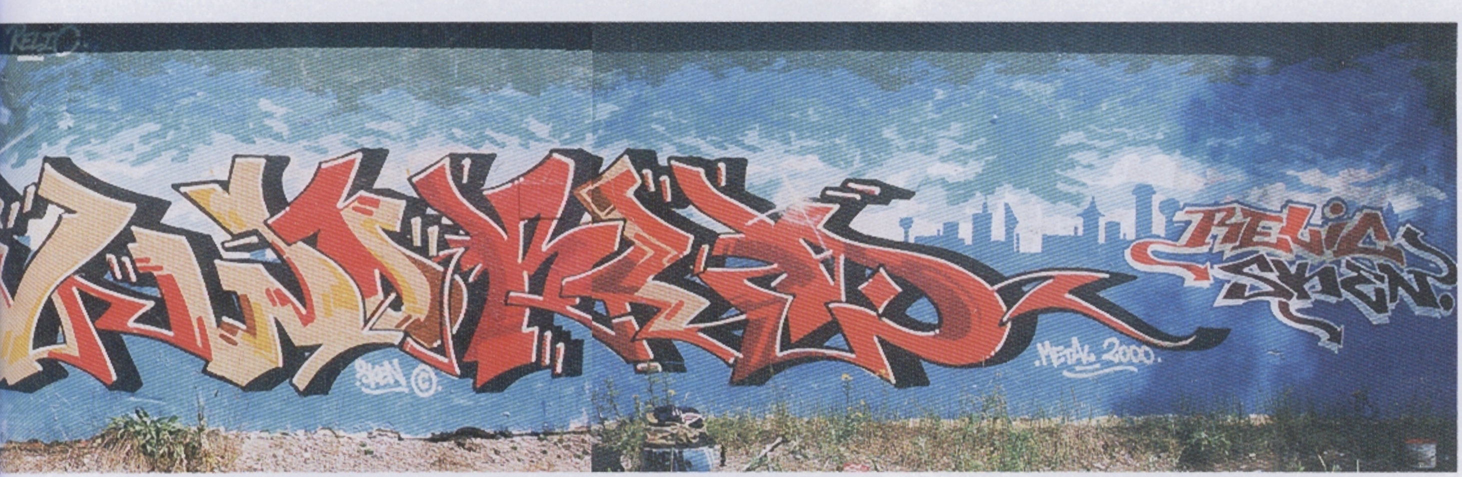
If I'm in a bad mood, it can be annoying when people go around pulling my chair. Otherwise I don't care. But I appreciate it if people ask if I need help before they give me any.

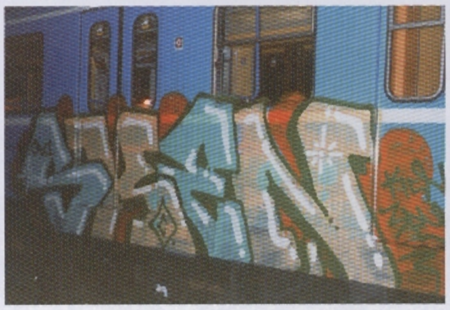
I can imagine it's hard not to get depressed after such a big change. How have you coped?

It's probably because I've had a lot to do. I've returned to work, met colleagues, been able to lead a normal life. When I took the train for the first time since the accident, it was fantastic. I felt like anybody. I'd be ashamed if I was sad and moped around, because in Sweden you're actually well looked after if



Sken – 2003

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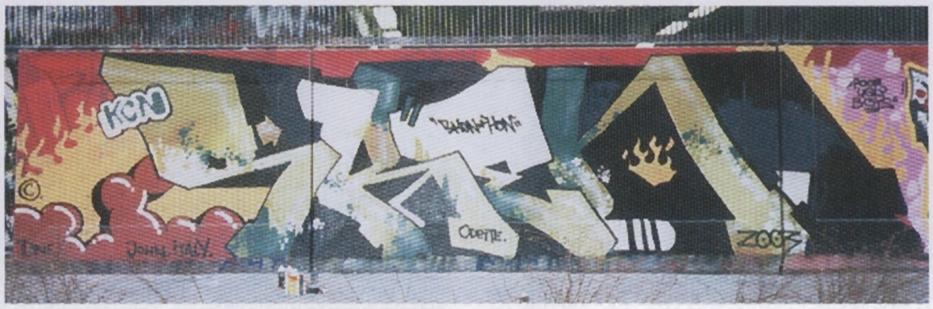

Sken – Malmö 2003

you're disabled. I saw this documentary on TV about a guy with no arms or legs, but still took care of himself. I mean, he was incredible. Then you see that you're not so badly off really. He was born that way and didn't know anything else. I can still be happy because I know what it's like playing soccer and being like everybody else. So I don't think I have a thing to moan about.

You don't blame your disability on graffiti?

No. I wouldn't have been there if it not for graffiti, but on the other hand, think how few writers get hurt in comparison with how many people get hurt in traffic accidents. You hear about that every week. So I don't blame anything on graffiti.

Where do you prefer to write?

I want to do the best graffiti possible in the time I have in a certain place. I like hardcore places, but style is the most important. I don't think color is important. It's about the style of the lettering. I don't care whether it's on a train or a wall. Doing trains is a great feeling. It's exciting. But a piece is cool regardless of its location.

Why not just write legally?

I think it's boring. There's no challenge. Anyone can do a legal piece. I think it's fun to surprise people and show them that I can do it. That's partly why I write, to astonish people.

Is it about the achievement?

Definitely. The style should be there regardless of how much time you have. If I were to write on a legal wall, I'd probably just do throw-ups. I don't feel I have anything to prove on a legal wall. That's no longer interesting to me. Graffiti is partly a competition about whose style is best. And so I think it's cool to show that I can do a really good style in illegal places. My pieces aren't that complicated, and if I'd done all of them on a legal wall, people would just shrug.

Do you ever think about this being costly for society?

No. I think that's stupid, because it only costs money if you want it to. There are better things to spend money on than cleaning up some pieces.

But you've benefited from society. Don't you think there's a contradiction in your going out bombing, which can after all be seen as vandalism of public property?

No, not at all. Society still makes money out of keeping me alive in the long run. The state loses an awful lot of money on suicides. During a lifetime, a person makes millions for society through work, taxes, and buying things.

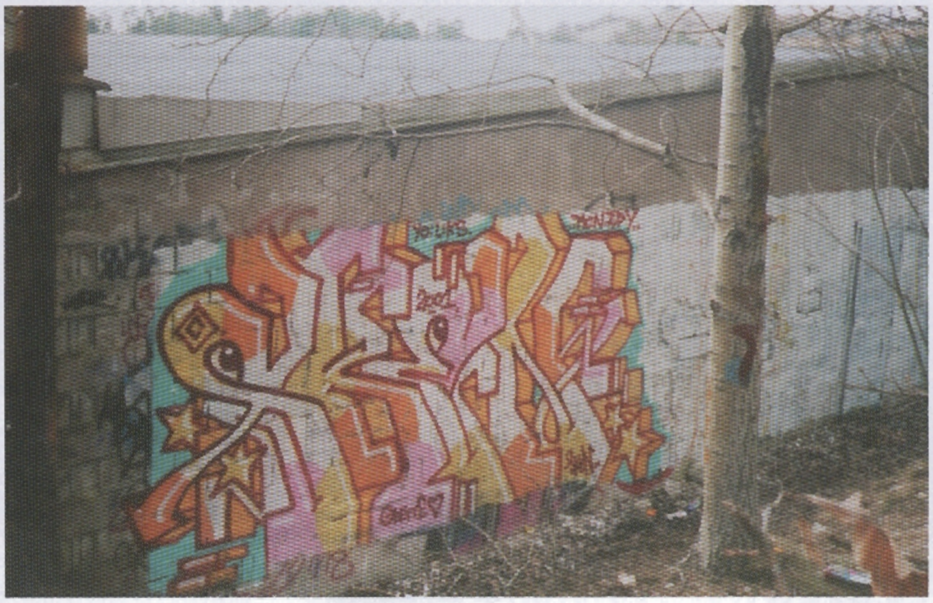
What is style to you?

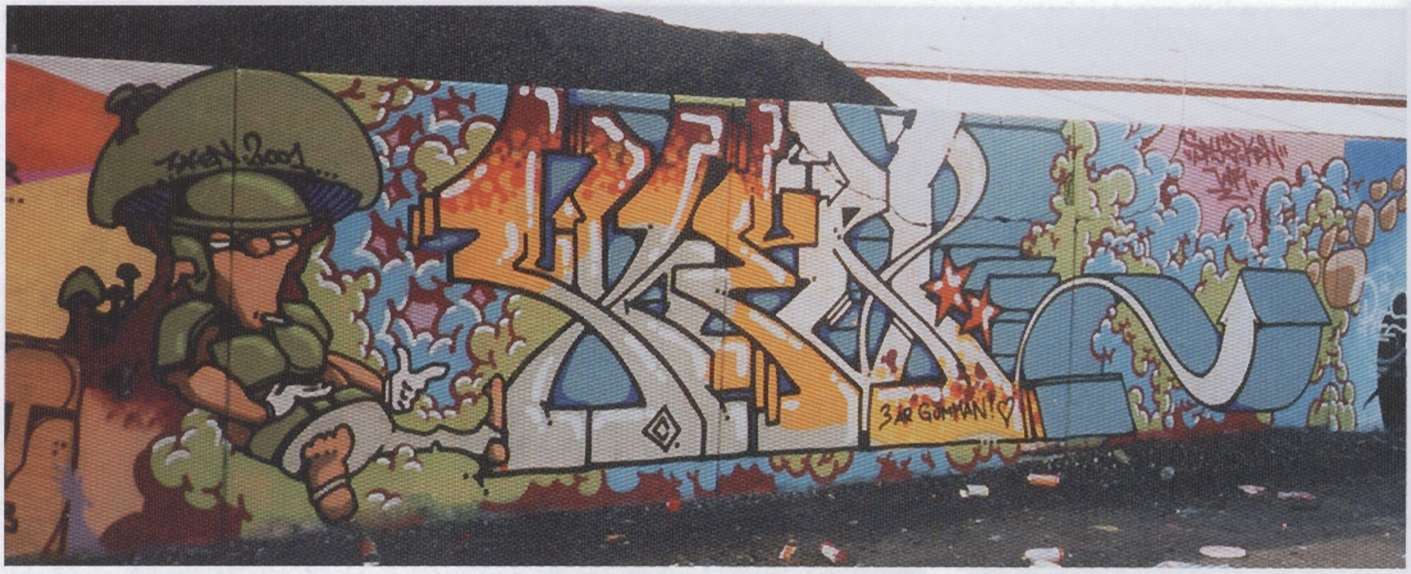
There should be something more behind the piece. You should have spent a lot of time sketching and have a thought about how it should look before going out to do it.

Have you found your own style?

It's really hard. A style of your own is something you've come up with yourself, something you're comfortable with. Something you don't see anyone else doing. I don't know if I'm there yet, but I'm trying.

I'm pretty inspired by old Finnish style,


Sken – 2001



Sken – Norrköping 2001

New York old school, and simple wildstyle. I like Danish old school graffiti a lot. That's the kind of graffiti I want to do. It's simple and very humorous. I can see why this kind of graffiti appeals to people who don't write themselves.

Is it important to you that your pieces are appreciated by other people than writers?

No, it's nothing I strive after. It's nice if people like them, but that's so unlikely that it doesn't matter how nicely you've done them. But it's important that it looks fun and has a bit of charm.

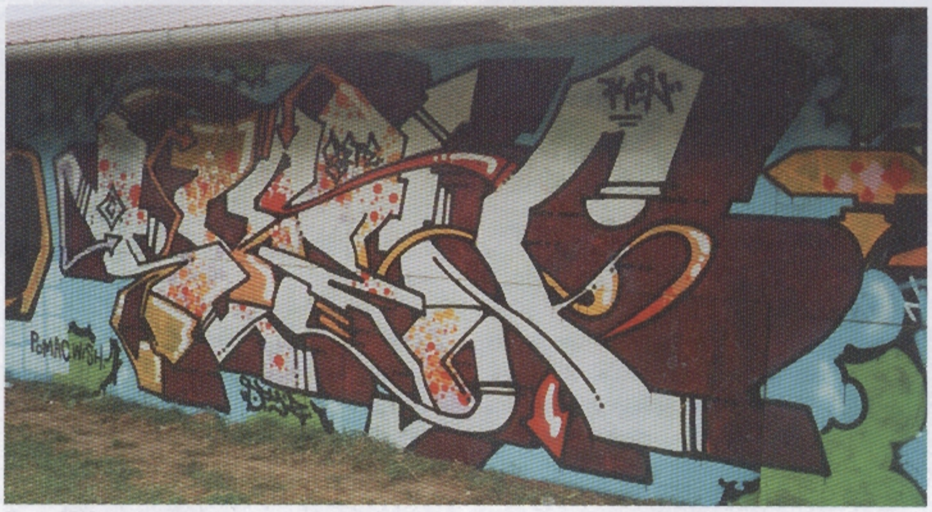
Are you inspired by any Swedish writers?

Yes, Cazter and Nug amongst others. Their pieces are very clean, but still wildstyle. They are the best writers Sweden has to offer. I think there's a very fine line between biting and being inspired. It's okay to look at a piece that gives you an idea of your own, but not ripping off a whole letter or style.

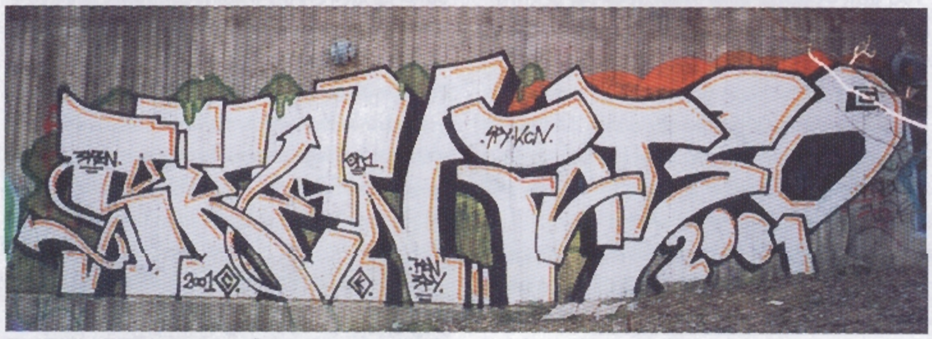
How has your style developed since you started?

You can usually see if someone's going to be good from the start. But I really sucked at first. Then I started copying Each's simple style. I think that's when I started to learn. It came together when I got other values about what was good and bad. I looked a lot at the models of those I liked and saw the basis for their inspiration. Then I started sketching a lot. I just sat working. I start from something simple that can be made nice. A nice throwup by someone who is good can be a hell of a lot better then a serious color piece by someone who isn't as good. I can appreciate a throwup a lot more. But you have to do both so as not to get repetitive. Even if you do wildstyle burners, you should do the odd bombing piece in chrome and black. They complete each other.

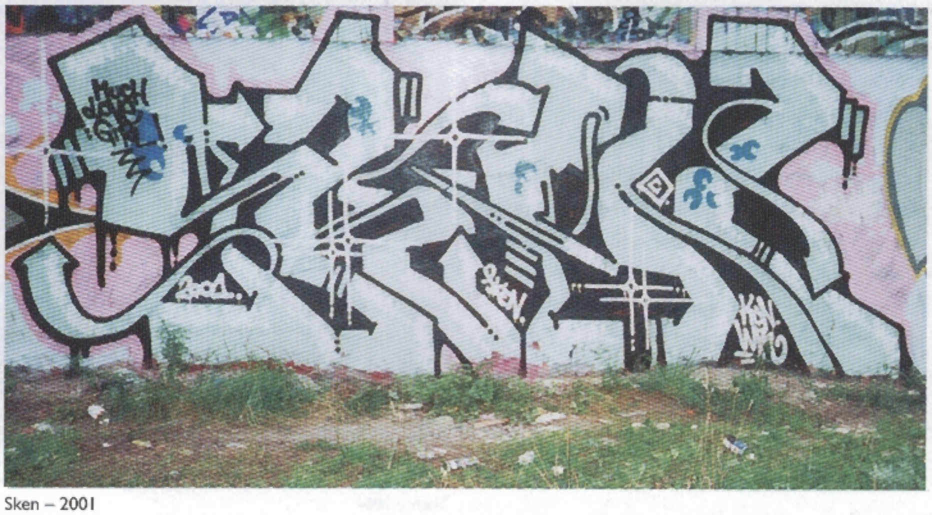
Björn Almqvist



Sken – 2001



Sken, Fatso – 2001



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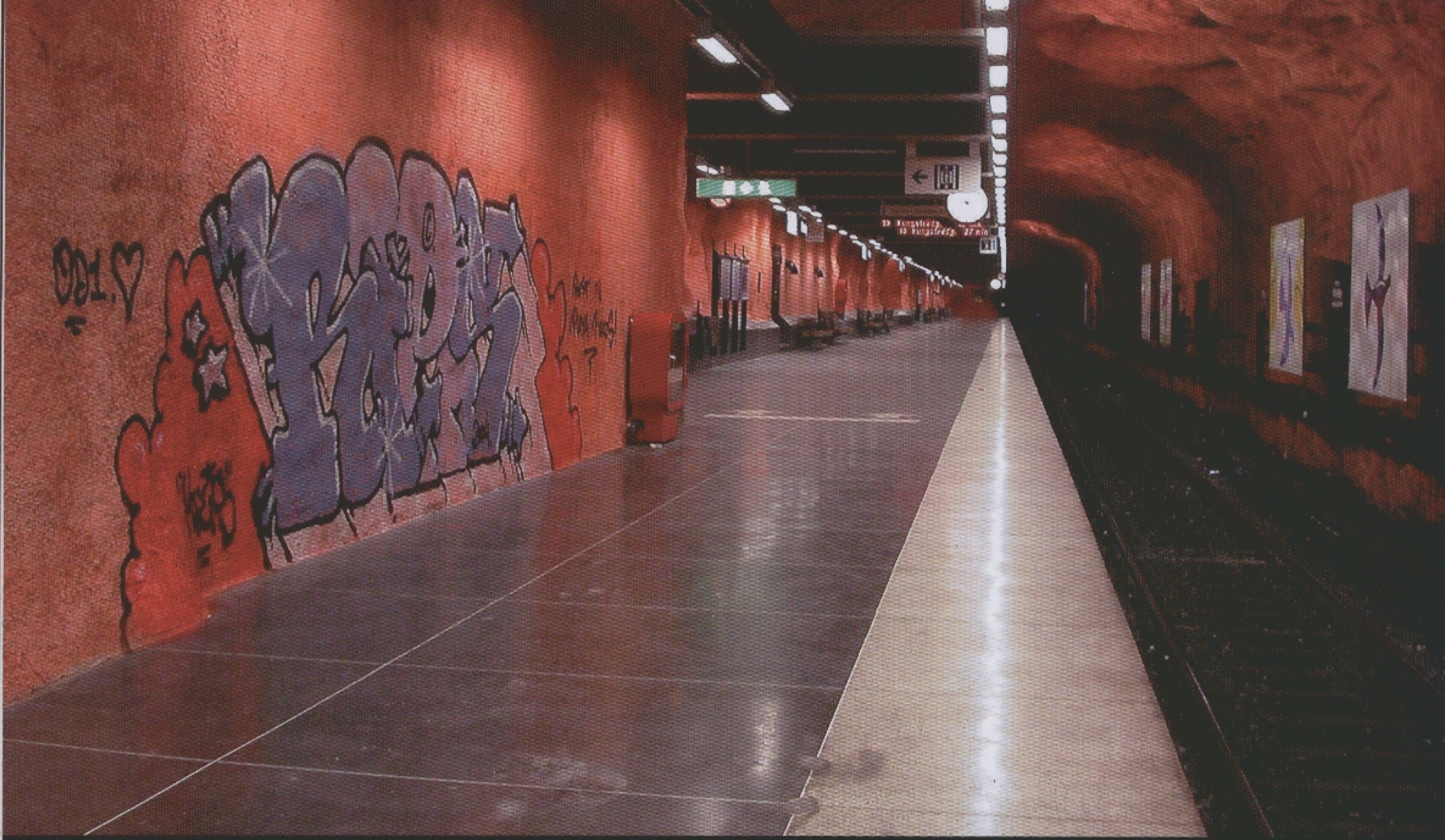
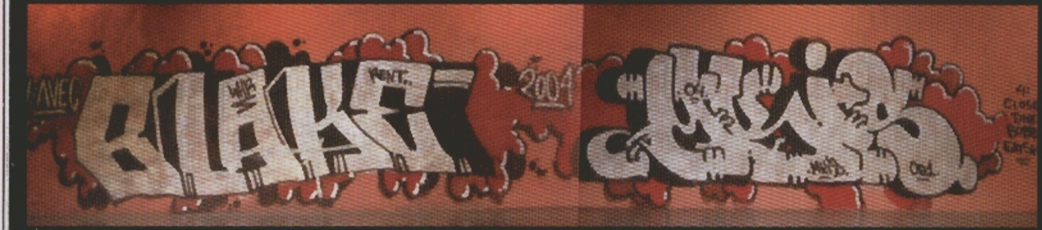

Rips – Stockholm subway station 2

M-KIS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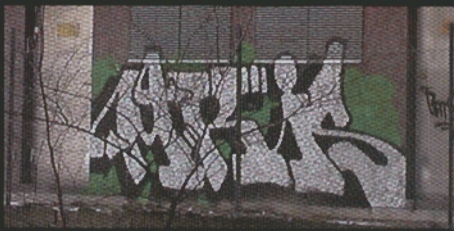
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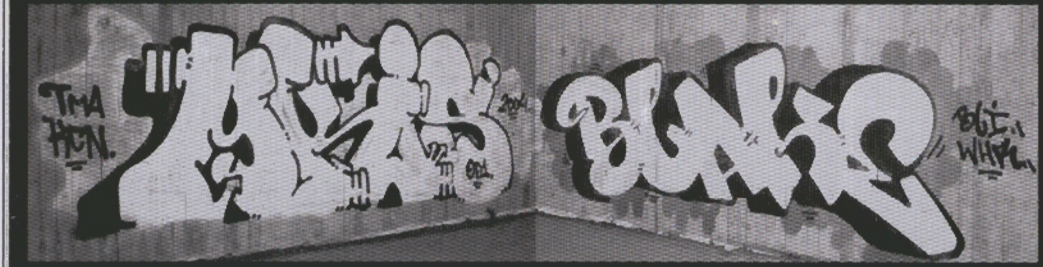
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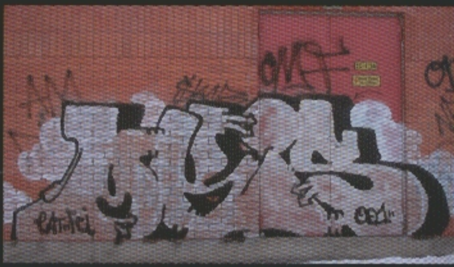
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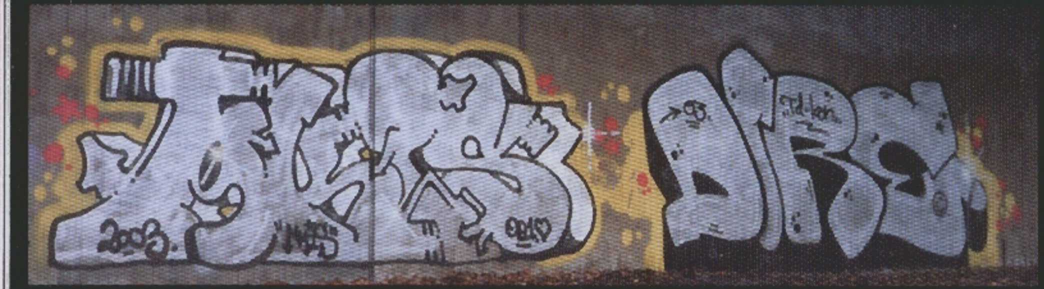

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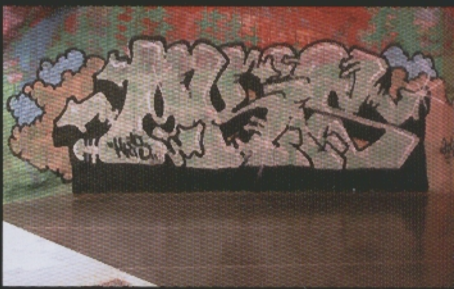
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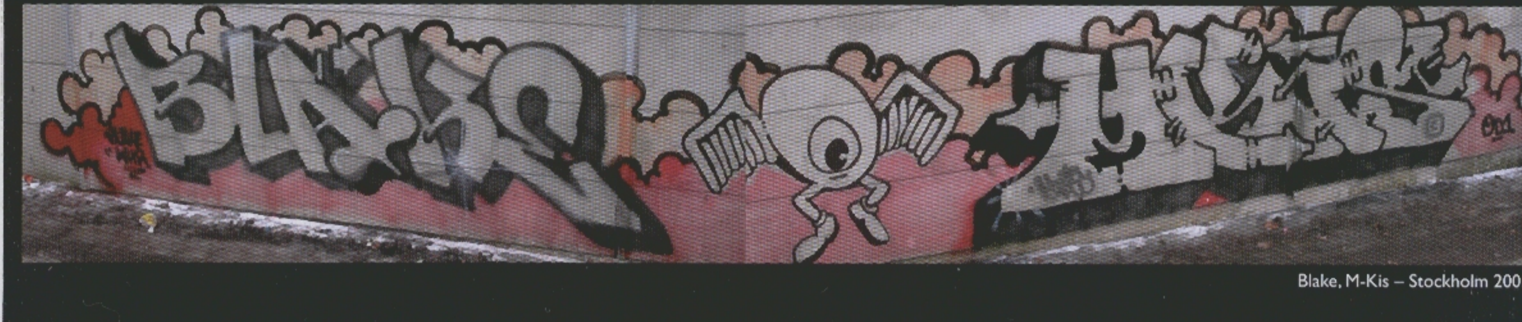
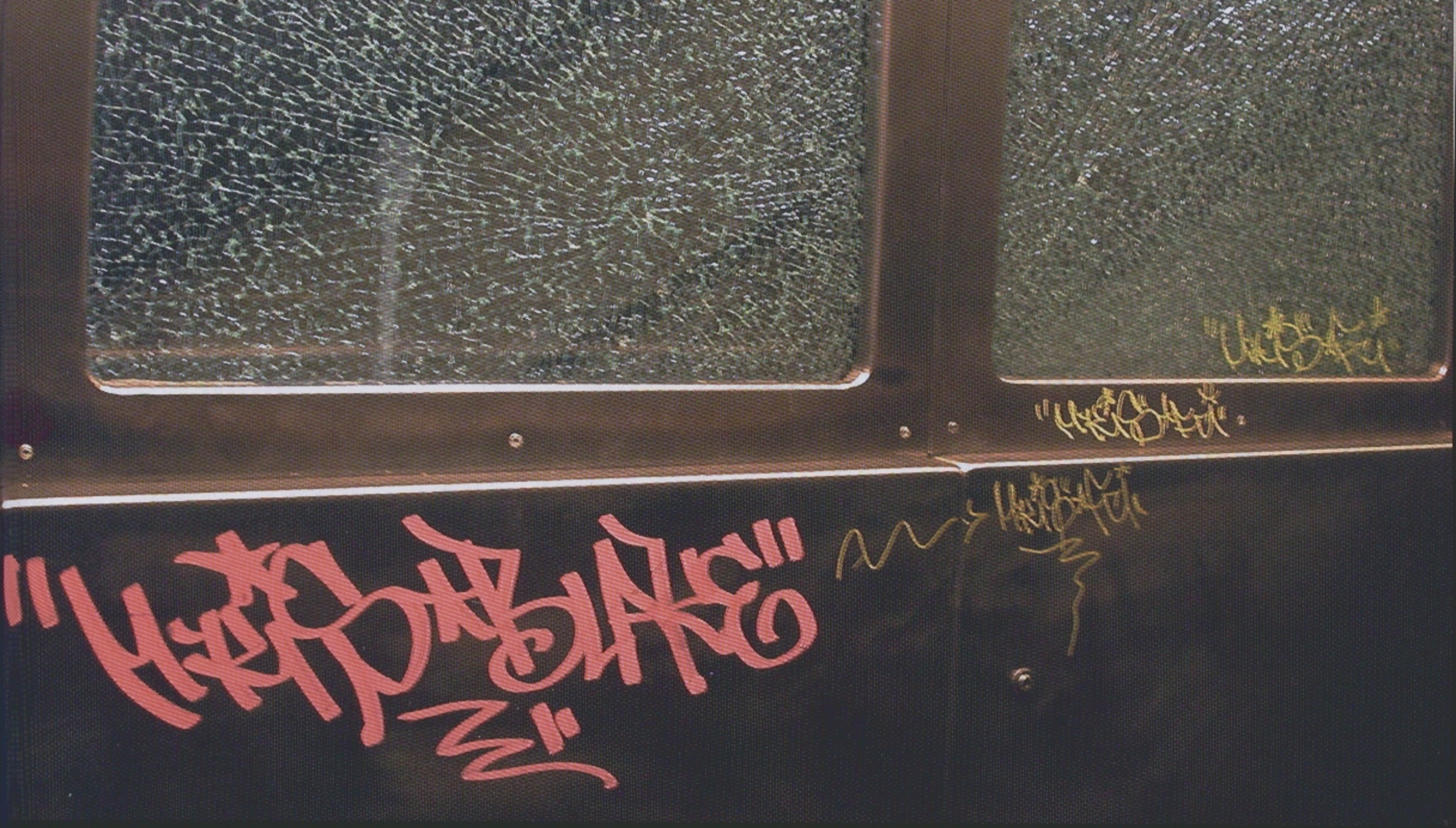
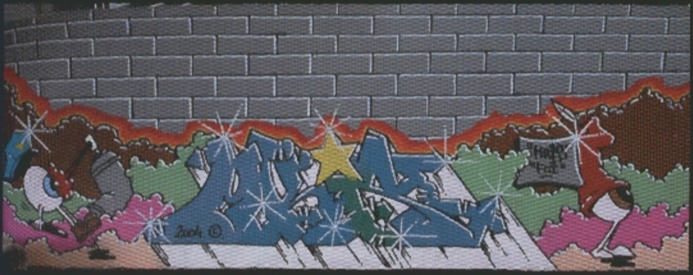


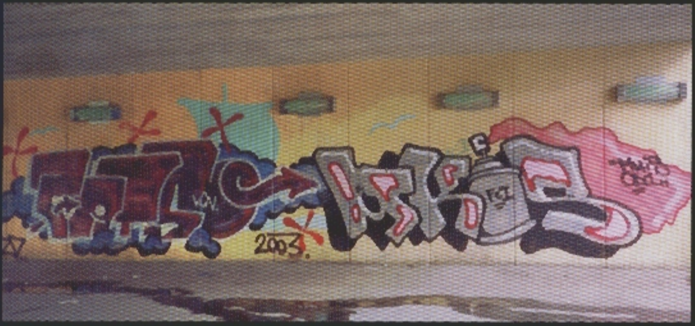
Blake, M-Kis – Stockholm 200



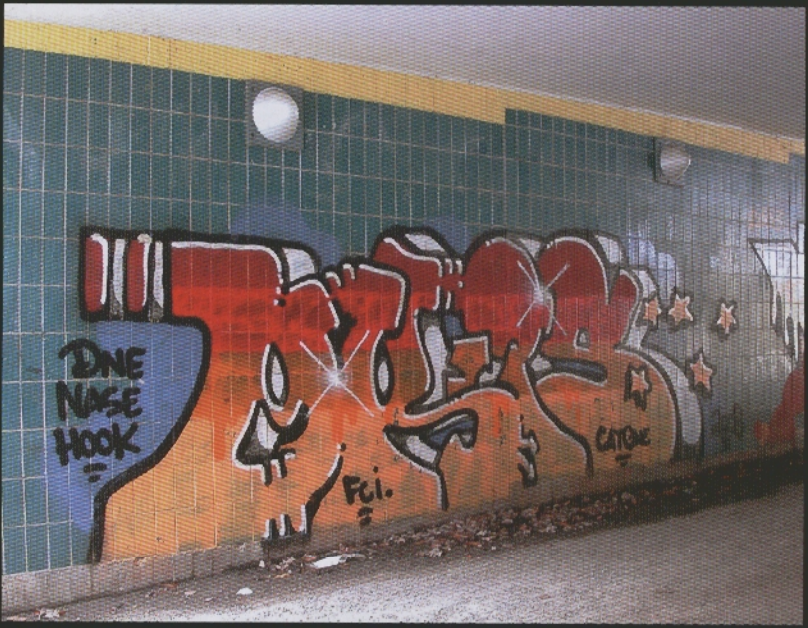
M-Kis, Blake – Stockholm



M-Kis – canvas



Fatso, M-Kis – Stockhom 2003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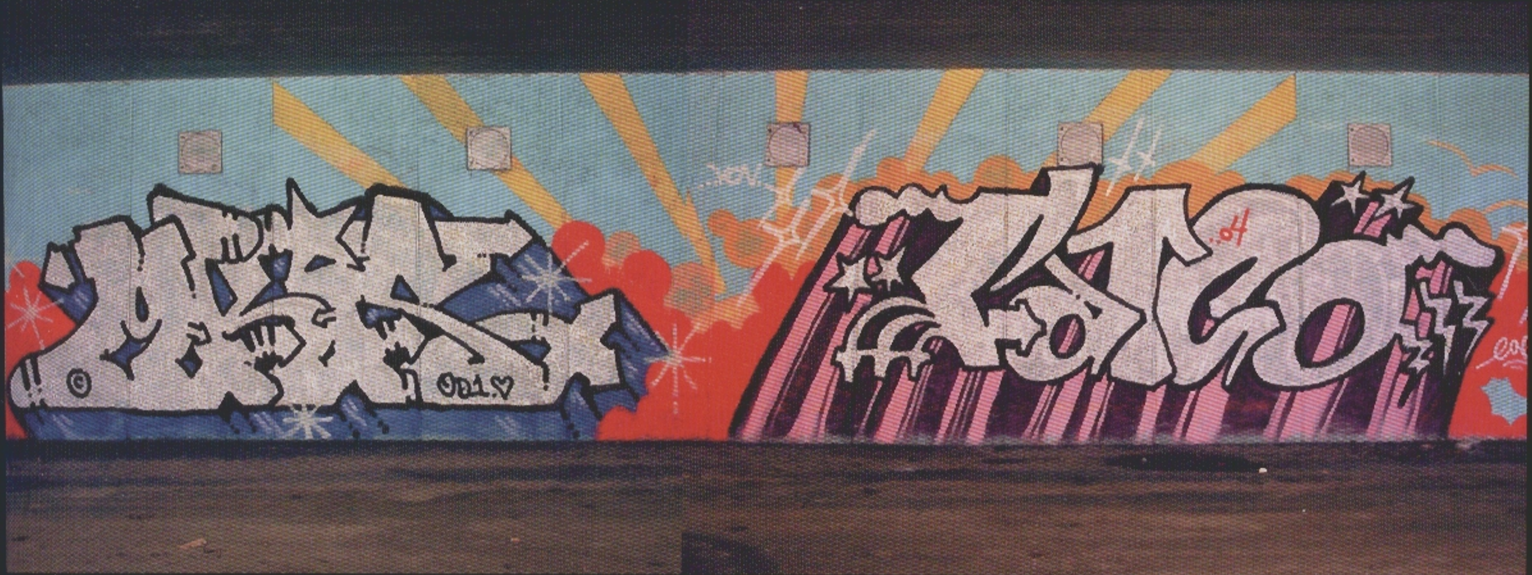

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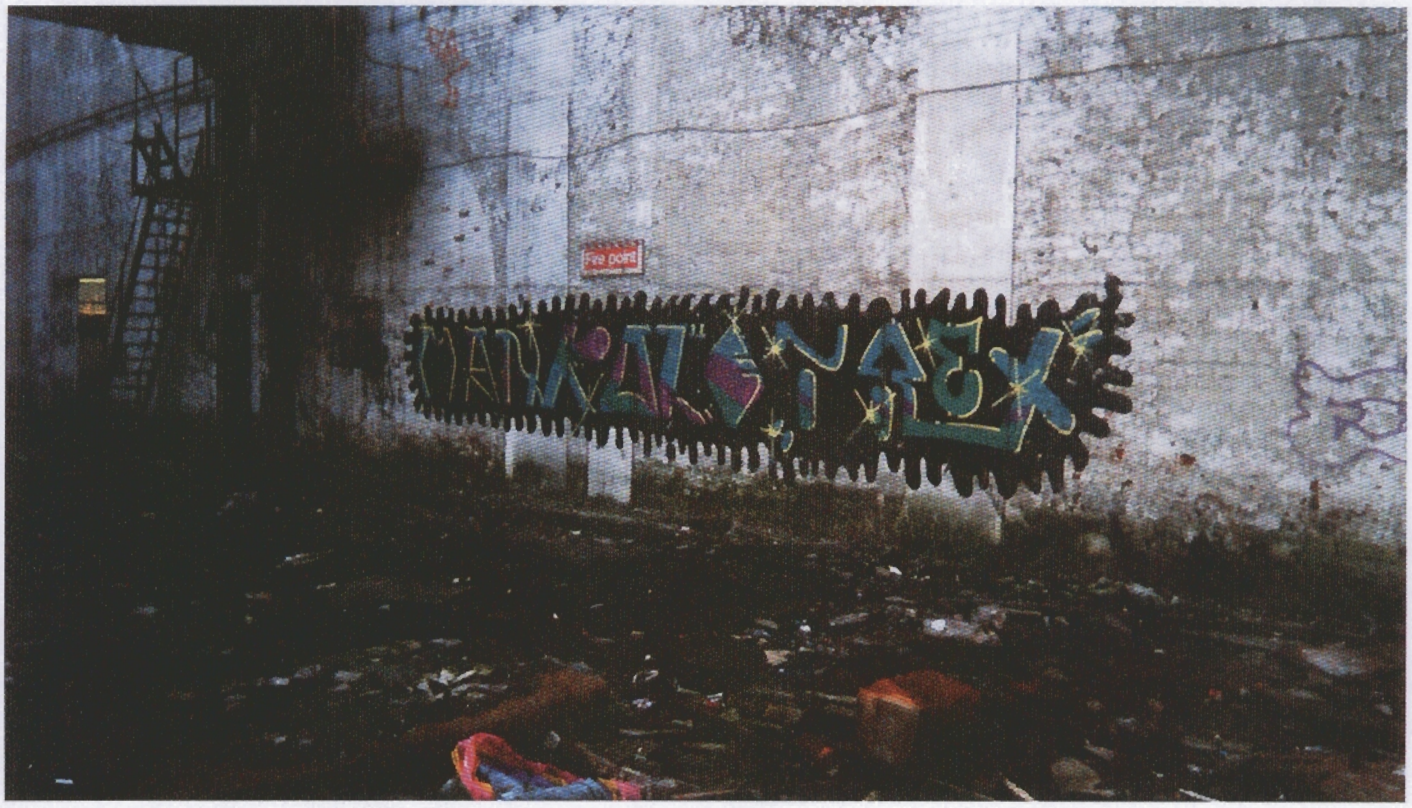


Man, Role, T-Rex – Sheffield 2003

"If it doesn't have funk, it's junk"

We recently received a letter containing interesting pictures with a Sheffield postmark. We asked Role to tell us about his town and his art.

"Sheffield is England's fourth largest city and contains around half a million inhabitants. Sprawling across seven valleys, it is situated in the South of Yorkshire near Manchester and Leeds. Sheffield and its surrounding areas played a crucial part in the industrial revolution during the early parts of the 19th Century, producing much of the world's steel products.

The city fell into a depression upon the collapse of the industry. Sheffield was once voted 'Europe's Dirtiest City' but now is enjoying an economic boost due to the rapidly increasing number of visiting students, which at last count made up for 40,000+ of the population. Sheffield plays home to the world's first 'organised' football club; **Sheffield Wednesday F.C**, which was originally started by a group of cricket players that met every Wednesday for a kickabout. Other citizens of interest include **The Human League, Jarvis Cocker, Sean Bean** and the legendary **Def Leppard.**"

How long have you been writing graffiti, and when did you start?

Graffiti caught up with me in the years 93-94. It was something everyone did at that time, my days at Secondary School were spent drawing in the back of my maths books, tagging desks and the lampposts that surrounded the local 'smoking' area. Me and a friend were caught by security cameras after spending weeks tagging the back of the school bus, we suffered a £25.00 fine and a week's detention.

I completed my first proper piece in 1997; it was around that time I started to take graffiti seriously.

What motivates you?

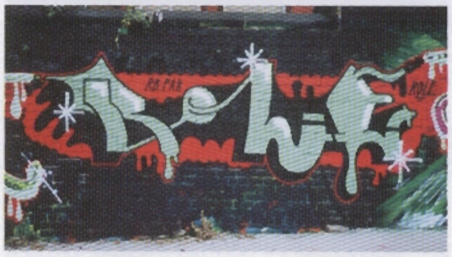
For me, there is a fine line between 'motivation' and 'inspiration'. If I am inspired, then I am usually motivated too. Graffiti motivates me, seeing newly-painted tags around me makes me question how much I am doing and results in making sure I go out and paint a piece or put up stickers or whatever.

If I haven't painted in a long time I get restless, I feel uncomfortable if there are ideas and sketches I have not put into play.

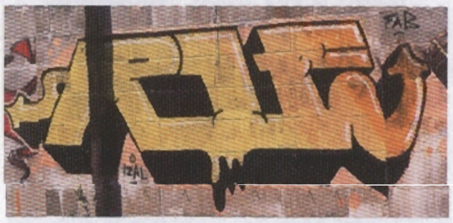
I consider myself a perfectionist, and therefore am rarely happy with what I do; I constantly start afresh, approaching what I do from a new angle. It is important to try and stay ahead of that which surrounds you, graffiti has and always will be about competition, I like to remember this. Attention is also a good motivator and attention from girls is a great motivator.

What makes a piece good?

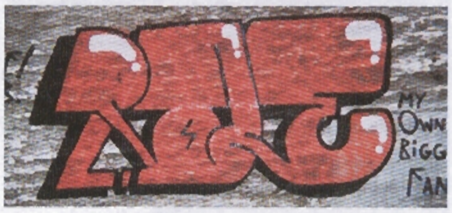
Funk, if it doesn't have funk its junk. I'm a



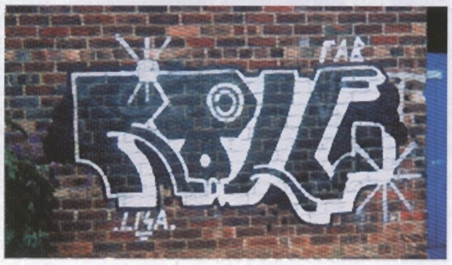
Role – Leeds 2003



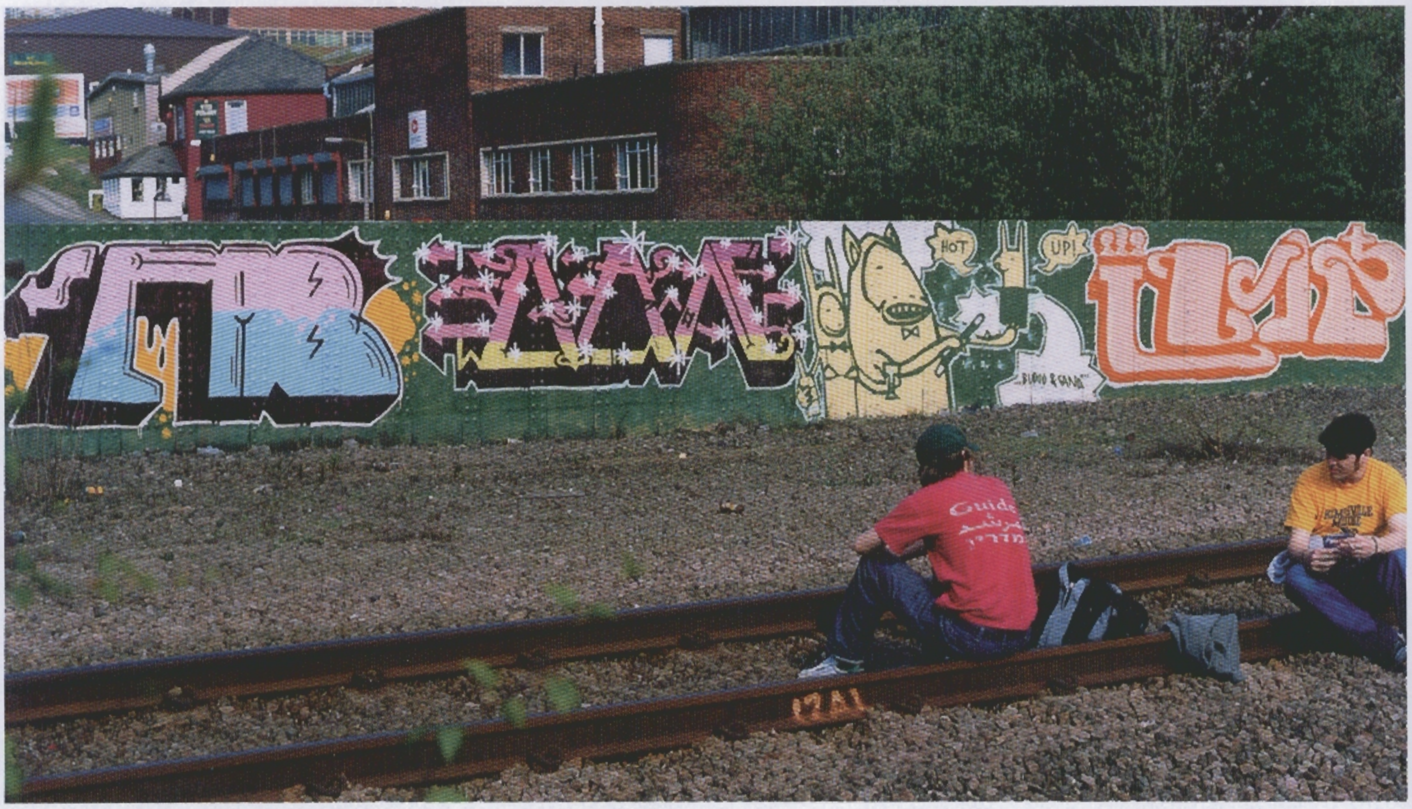
Role – Cornwall 2002



Role – Sheffield 2003



Role – Sheffield 2003



Role, Man I, Kid Acne, Izal – Sheffield 2003

traditionalist when it comes to letters, I like arrows, I like connections, I like do-dads. Pieces that attract me are ones that are aware of graffiti's history, homage's to the old pioneers.

There is a lot to be learnt from the past, sometimes people are too concerned with looking forward. Stylistically, if you stray too far from graffiti's roots you wind up in some minimalist, conceptual, street-art vortex that excites everyone apart from graffiti artists and that ain't my bag.

> **"Graffiti is based on the name and therefore the letter is the most important"**

I enjoy simple pieces that rely on the letters; light colour fill, darker outline, highlights and a cool 3-D or shadow. I am not a fan of complex fills and shading techniques, of course I respect a lot of these graffiti artists that experiment with realistic 3-D effects, they are doing something new and what they do takes a lot of talent, but does their pieces got the funk?

Graffiti is based on the name and therefore the letter is the most important thing. People should remember that.

What do you want to achieve?

As I mentioned before, I am a perfectionist, I only want to achieve a sense of self-satisfaction. It is not important that people like what I do, of course it is nice to have positive feedback from others but that attention is secondary. I am not, and never have claimed to be an old hand at graffiti and I am still learning, I look forward to achieving new things in new places.

Travelling is important to me, what I do has taken me to many places and helped me meet many interesting people, I hope there is more of this to come in the future. Hopefully one day my album will be full of pieces that I am one hundred percent happy with.

The English graffiti scene is relatively unknown in Sweden. Tell us about it from your point of view.

The English graffiti scene is very parochial. Not many writers venture further than their own front yard, people keep to themselves. Most hardcore bombers adhere to traditional styles, easy chrome letters that suit the situation and environment.

The scene has changed drastically with the advent of graffiti magazines and specialised graffiti materials. Things are slowly changing; nowadays there are writers that adopt a more contemporary and informed style. More people are travelling and looking further afield for inspiration, which is a definite plus side of the increase in graffiti media.

> **"Above all graffiti should be great fun."**

There are however, people that simply copy styles from abroad, this is not so good for the English scene and dilutes whatever individuality we already have. As an English writer I do not feel part of the European scene, maybe this simply because of the small stretch of cold water that separates the country from the rest of mainland Europe. I believe too few writers explore the possibilities of inter-railing or take advantage of the cheap flights available. England does however, have some great writers which maybe keep to themselves a little more than others, this is a very English trait and typical of English sensibilities.

Your pieces differ quite a lot from other English graffiti.

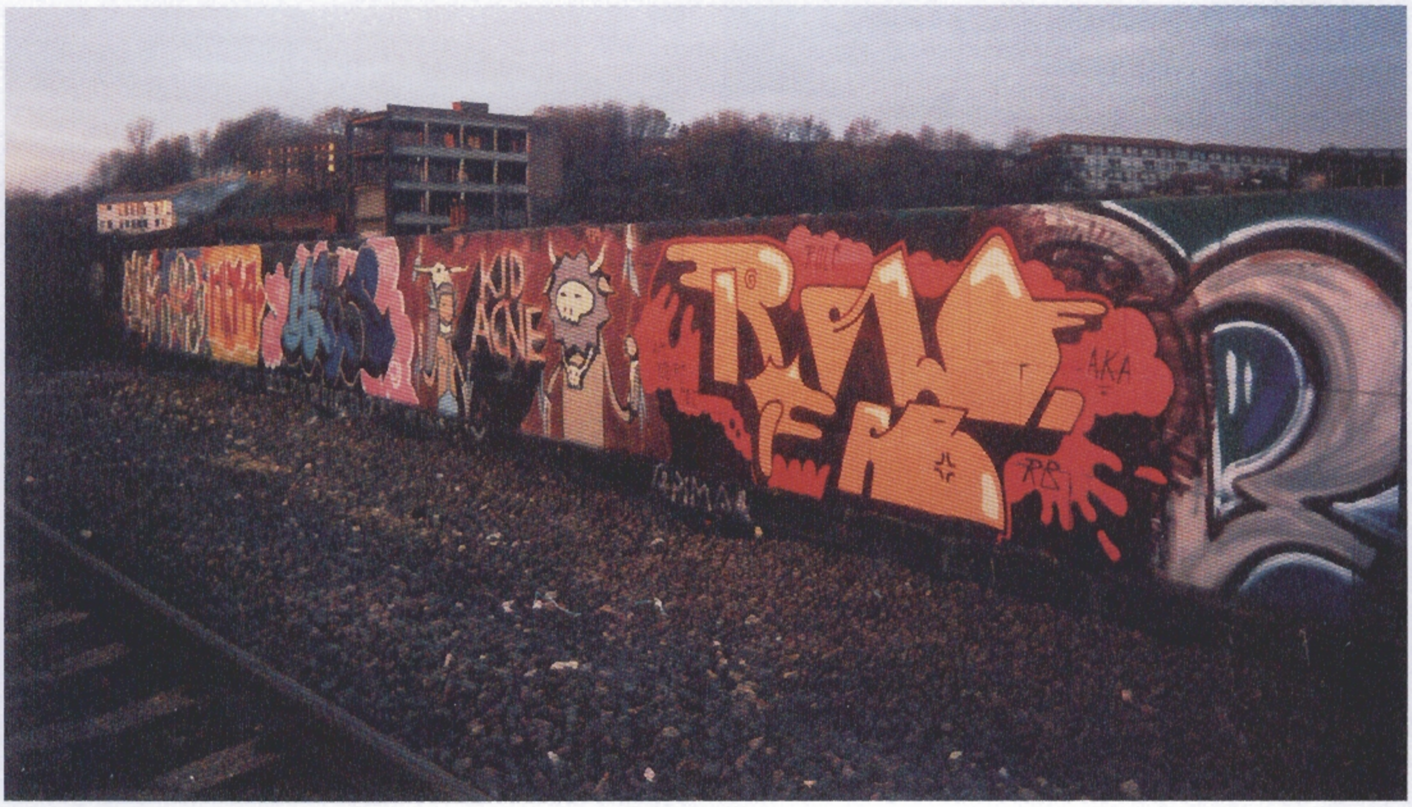
It depends on what you are making the comparison with, the traditional English style bores me, most of the pieces done today are stuck in the mid-nineties. I'm not attempting to change anything or anyone but I enjoy the idea of trying to challenge the notions of how graffiti should be done.

Above all graffiti should be great fun, and that is all I'm trying to do. I think this is reflected in my pieces and my approach to graffiti as a whole.

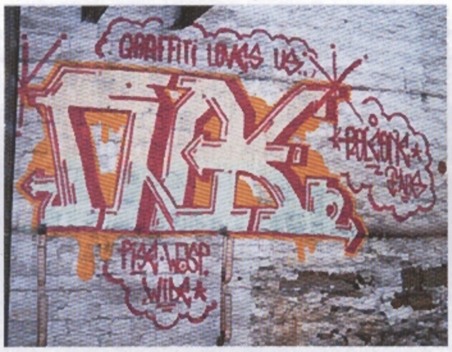
What inspires you?

My main source of inspiration comes from the crew, **The Fabs**, a messed up bunch of hicks that don't know when to quit. Inspiration comes not only from the graffiti but the lifestyle; getting drunk, getting high and getting my party on.

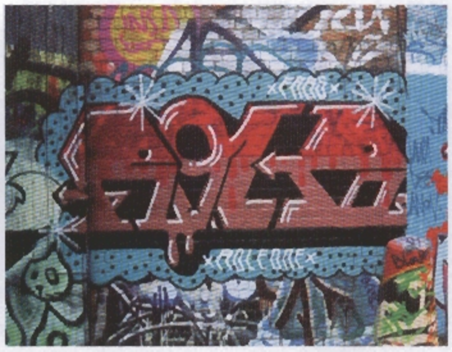
Me and my boy **Man I/Wasp** have travelled a little, shared stories and experiences, I bite his stuff regularly, and he tries to sneak the odd thing from my blackbook. Meeting **Izal/T-Rex** made a big difference to my pieces, he is the original old school punk rocker, he could pop a mean backspin to baby freeze before you could say 'Beat Street'.



Heks, Kid Acne, Role – Sheffield 2003



Role – Sheffield 2004



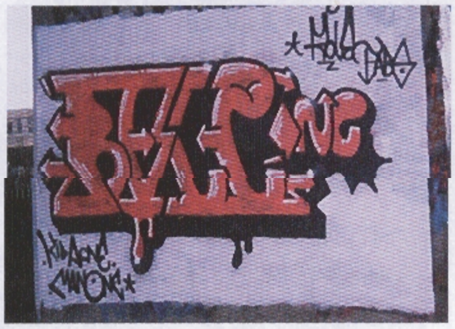
Role – London 2004

Pise is raw, he gets indecent at every possible opportunity. **Kid Acne/Edna** influenced the way I think, that dude is a serious baller, always on point. I also enjoy the work of other English writers such as **Carl**, **Siege**, **Petro**, **Akt**, **Oker**, **Dels**. They all are doing cool stuff at the moment.

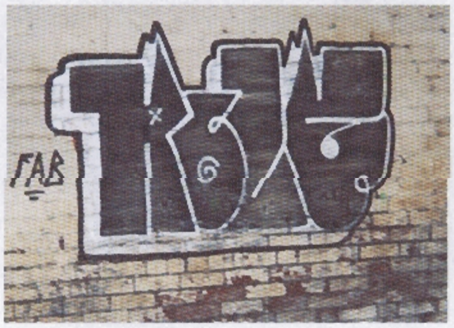
Travelling to Sweden influenced me a lot, the time we spent with **Maes** was great fun, I admire him and the **CP** crew for what they are doing with graffiti at the moment. Aside from graffiti writers I get a lot of inspiration from things that are not directly related to graffiti.

I enjoy looking at hand-painted signs, children's drawings and various things that are naïve in nature. My little sister and brother have helped me out with outlines before, it is sometimes good to completely deconstruct something in order to fully understand it.

Björn Amqvist



Role – London 2004



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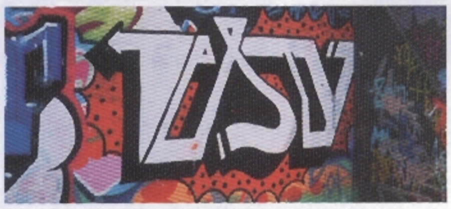
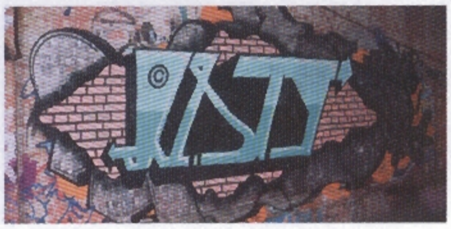
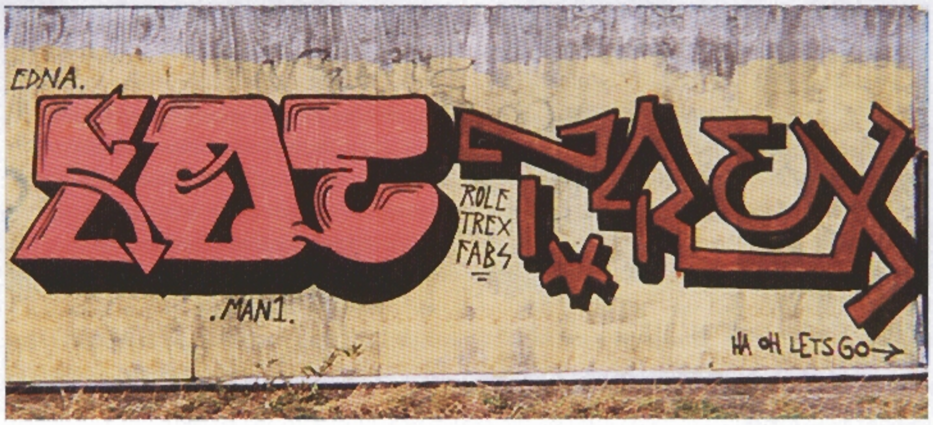


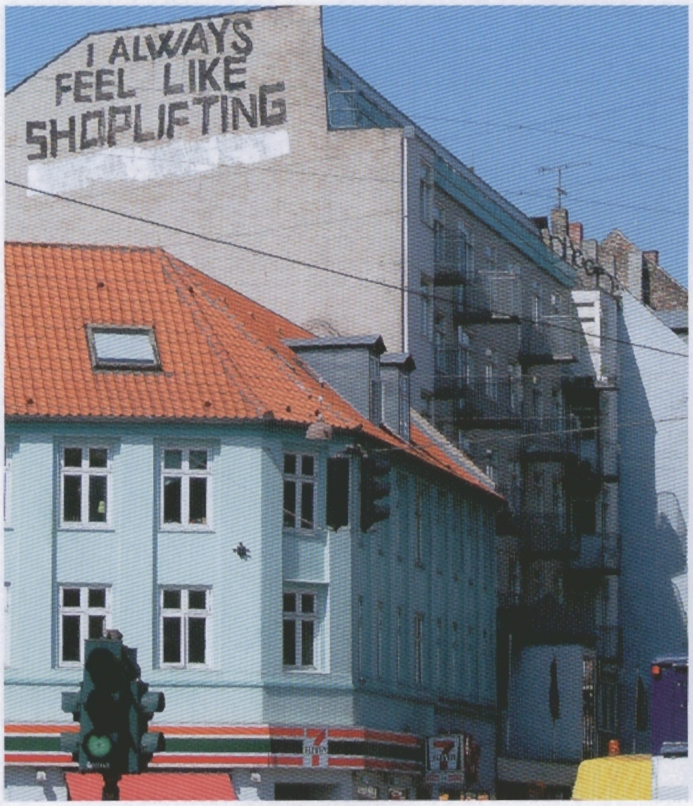
Dusty by Role – London 2004



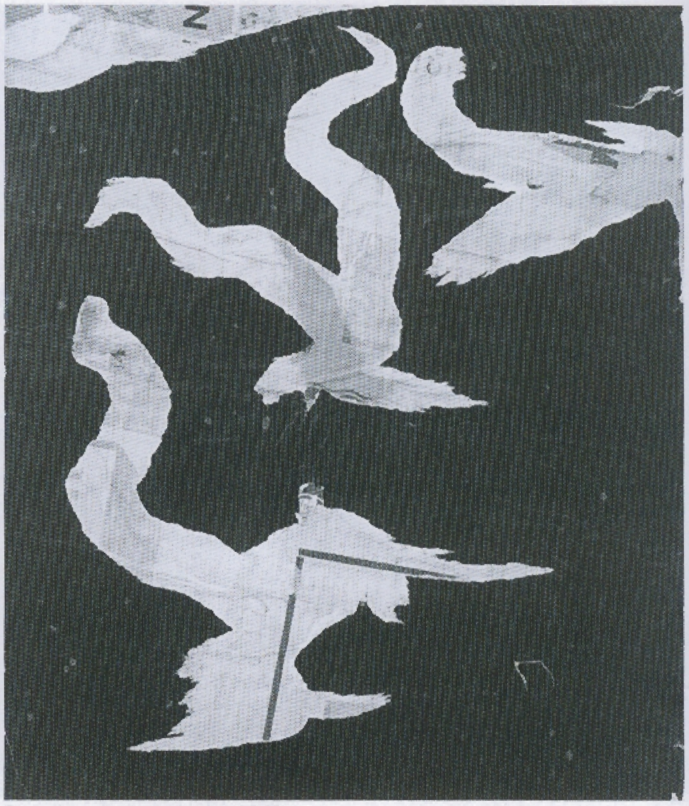
Dusty by Role – London 2004



Role, T-Rex – Sheffield 2003



I Always Feel Like Shoplifting – Copenhagen



Décollage by Ager Jorn – 1960

The creative revolution and the politics of graffiti

Though graffiti is usually considered to be the province of snotty kids, certain historical phenomena remind us of it. Rasmus F. Hansen muses on the similarity between the 1871 Paris Commune, the Situationists of the 1960s and contemporary bombing.

I have come to suspect that more is at stake in the public discourse on graffiti than re-coloured surfaces. What is so inherently threatening about graffiti is its challenge to the prevailing image of public space and the control thereof. In the current order of things, control of public space is centralized and left to the discretion of government and city councils and, of course, commercial interests, all too visible by the appearance of billboards in the cityscape. This situation could not exist were it not for its acceptance by the majority of citizens.

Graffiti is so demonised exactly because of its daring challenge of the widely accepted notion that public space does not belong to *anybody*, and indeed, in the current situation, it does not. The government and the city council are administrative entities, not *somebody* in the sense that you and I are *somebody* in relation to each other and our environment. A truly public space should take shape with the active participation of its inhabitants, not as something standardized and prepackaged.

This is what the **Communards** of the 1870s, and later, the **Situationists** realized. To add a historical perspective to the symbolic and social perspectives of graffiti, let us take a look at these two phenomena.

The Paris Commune

For five months, from September 1870 to January 1871, Paris was under siege by the Prussian army, with whom they had been at war for a year. During the siege, the resentment of the poor classes surfaced. Due to the restoration of the inner city, many people were pushed out into the suburbs with a feeling of having lost their city. Some Parisians were unwilling to accept the surrender of the city to the Prussian troops, and the National Guard refused to give up their arms. In the face of massive protest, the Government retreated to Versailles while the insurgents occupied the city and set up the autonomous Paris Commune in March 1871.

A truly public space should take shape with the active participation of its inhabitants

Even though the lifetime of the Commune was short, it became a great source of inspiration and hope for socialists all over. Despite internal quarrelling, the Commune managed to implement their political strategies of direct democracy, policies of equality and the betterment of worker's conditions. It is estimated that 30-40,000 people were killed when the Commune-controlled areas were attacked by the army and finally defeated in May 1871.

The Situationists

The Situationist Internationale, (SI), was formed in 1957 by the French artist-intellectual **Guy Debord** and the Danish artist **Asger Jorn** as an artistic rebellion against the alienation and consumerism of modern life. The SI never had more than twenty active members at any time, but still managed to secure themselves a page in the art history books. They were inspired by the events and ideas surrounding the uprising of the Paris Commune and by Marxism and anarchism, although they saw certain shortcomings in both of these isms.

The artistic philosophy of the Situationists was an activist philosophy which, among other things, had them disrupting an art critics' meeting, a Charlie Chaplin press conference and a Catholic mass in the Notre Dame cathedral, as well as the decapitation of the much-famed statue of The Little Mermaid in the harbour of Copenhagen.

One central artistic method of the Situationists was the *detournement,* or in other words, playful reconstructive behaviour, through which the aim was to subvert both the source and the meaning of existing works of

HOLGER
DANSKE

Truck by Itso – Copenhagen. Graffiti is about the redefinition of public space through new uses of the urban territory; walls, trains and trucks become canvases and thus acquire new meaning to those initiated.

art or of public places or objects. Graffiti messages such as 'Same thing day after day: tube - work - dinner - work - tube - armchair - TV - sleep - tube - work - how much more can you take?' were among the means used for this purpose. Another key feature of the Situationist theory was psychogeography, the study of the effect of the city's environment on the human psyche, which was explored in the *dérive*, best translated as the aimless drifting through the cityscape to take in all its impressions.

The politics of graffiti

The modern tradition of graffiti sprung from a less intellectualised and political soil. It too, however, was about the redefinition of public space through new uses of the urban territory; walls, trains and trucks became canvases and thus acquired new meaning to those initiated. Graffiti grew to be the most significant unauthorized and decentralized public art form in history. With a world to conquer that is growing ever smaller, graffiti has spread worldwide within three decades. It can now be found in Mexico, Yugoslavia and Japan and many places in between, either because of the emergence of local scenes or on account of visiting writers who leave their marks as they pass through.

Unlike the earlier cultural phenomena of this kind, graffiti does not have a pronounced political goal, not even an ism. This does not mean, of course, that graffiti art has no social or political implications. Indeed, the social signals inherent in graffiti were soon understood by clever writers and their enemies alike. Graffiti, like the actions of the Communards and the Situationists is, when clandestinely and illegally executed, a direct challenge to the dogma of power structures and property rights, regardless of the personal motivation of the artist. And there are few things that authority likes worse than challenge and insubordination and the breaking of rules.

Writers such as **Lee** saw in graffiti a possibility for public self-expression and addressing of social and political issues in an aesthetic and creative way. Others saw it as 'a symbol that we've lost control!' So symbolically threatening is apparently graffiti that it ranks as number four on the top ten of the Danes' worst perceived social evils.

This is where **Jeff Ferrell** comes in. Ferrell is a professor of criminology at the Texas Christian University and the author of the excellent book about anarchist street culture and public space, called Tearing Down the Streets.

What I would like you to do is to thematically connect the Communards, the Situationists and modern graffiti, if you think this is possible?

"Well, certainly it is. What the Communards did in the streets of Paris became sort of a model for the Situationists, and the way it connects to modern graffiti is through the revolution of everyday life; to resist authority, to create these casual moments of excitement and pleasure and artistry, which suggest a better way to live while you are doing it. What these historical movements did and what graffiti does now, is to overturn the predictability of everyday life. What the great anarchist thinker **Bakunin** said, was that 'the passion for destruction is a creative passion as well', and this statement suits this discussion perfectly.

Graffiti may be destructive behaviour in a sense, but it is in the interest of being creative. It seems to me that one reason why the authorities are so adamantly against graffiti is that it does the same thing as these earlier traditions, which is to create a whole new world of meaning that flies in the face of the usual meanings of what an urban area looks like. Power is exercised by being able to control how things appear, that is, through aesthetics and symbolism, and graffiti is a beautiful and subversive attack on the symbolic nature of power. So what goes on in this conflict of interests is a battle over the nature of everyday life."

"Graffiti is a beautiful and subversive attack on the symbolic nature of power."

For the purpose of this discussion: What is your definition of public space?

"That's a wonderful question! It seems to me that the political authorities want to talk about public space, but what it usually means is a space run *by* them *for* the public, which generally means privatisation and officially sanctioned building projects.

To me, genuine public space is space that neighbourhoods and communities have access to and are able to negotiate the meaning of. In USA, the amount of actual public space is almost zero. Here, most of what is being presented as public space is really consumer space. What graffiti writers do is to take back this space. A hall of fame where writers meet and share ideas is much more of a public space than a carefully managed park."

But even if graffiti has a lot of political and social implications, I suppose many writers do not really see it that way; they just write for the fun of it, to get up.

"From an anarchist view, politics is visceral; it is in the pit of your stomach and most of the graffiti writers I know have this remarkable existential orientation to defy authority, and there certainly is a politics to that. It is an everyday revolt that you experience by doing it. What I experienced, hanging out with a bunch of writers, and creating murals, was an act of phenomenally powerful politics in terms of what it freed us to do, compared to the usual structures of authority."

"The passion for destruction is a creative passion as well."

So it becomes political by interpretation.

"Excellent point. And during my five years in the graffiti underground, I saw many people change from doing graffiti for themselves to actually doing it *against* the authorities. One ironic effect of the anti-graffiti campaigns was that some writers said: 'Fuck it! I'm going to start tagging police cars now!'"

The creative revolution

Graffiti is loosely organized and therefore functions on an individual and interpersonal basis of small groups of people. Graffiti is anarchistic in the sense of being an anti-authoritarian do-it-yourself culture with no formal leaders; it is not an organization that can be targeted and brought down from the top. Thus decentralized and without any articulated motto but 'bomb!', graffiti writers are able to stay ahead of the authorities. This, I submit, is the crucial strength of the graffiti culture, that which has kept it alive during many years of fierce attacks from many sides.

Graffiti writers, along with other unauthorized street cultures like skaters, stencil artists and street musicians, let out an important call for a change from an observatory to a participatory public space, one in which the inhabitants are not complacently expecting someone else to design and control their surroundings according to city regulations and commercial interests. What we need is a creative revolution from within ourselves, and graffiti is a part of this revolution.

Rasmus F Hansen

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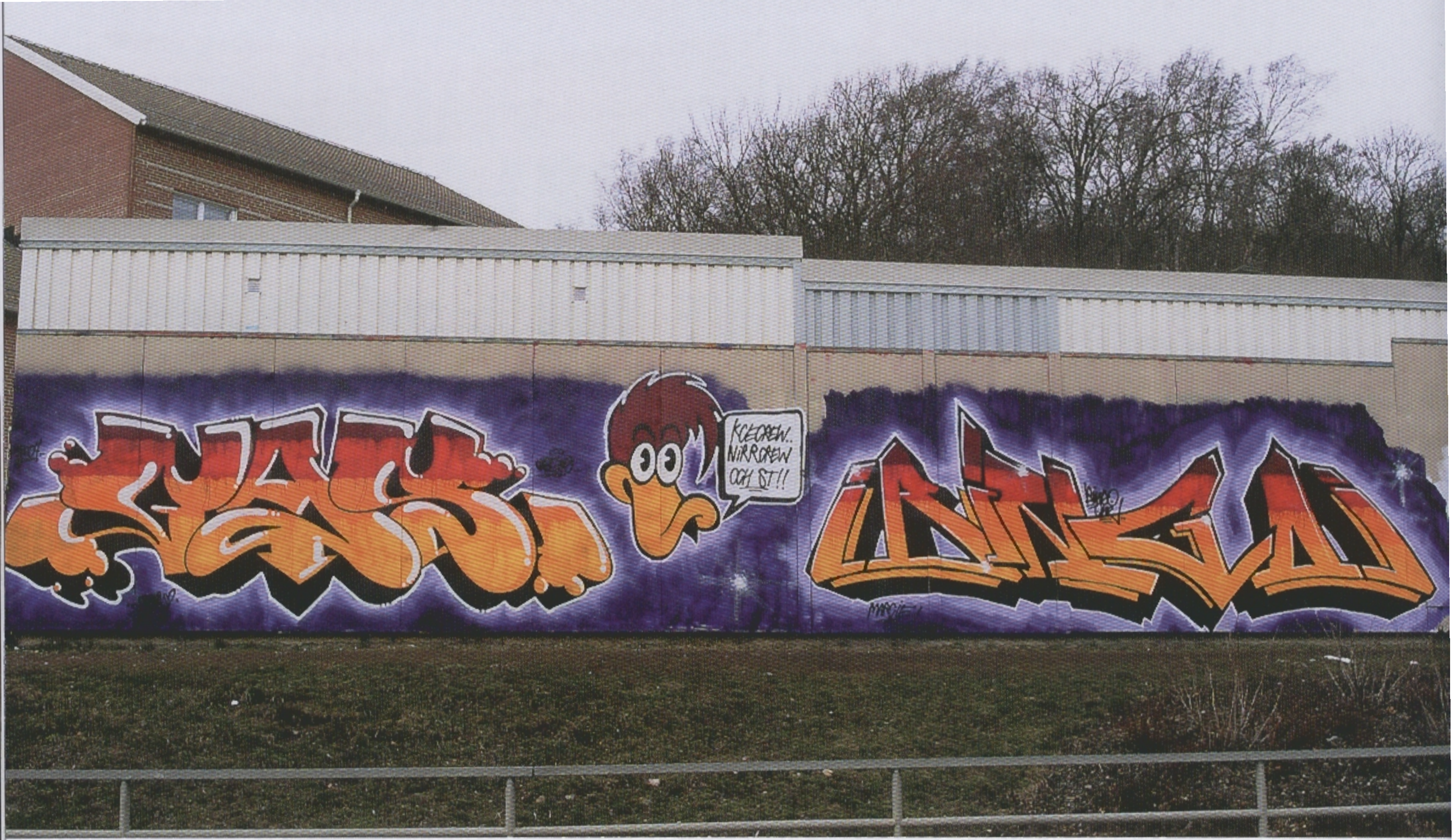


Gas, Bingo – 2004

Gas

Gas is one of the oldest active writers in Gothenburg. He was part of the generation of writers in the mid-90s who were inspired by Danish wildstyle pieces.

When did you start to write?

I did my first piece in 1986, but I was so small then that it doesn't really count. I really first began in 1991-92. I was a passive writer for quite a while.

Which crews are you in?

Svensktoppen and Nirr. Nirr doesn't mean anything. It's just real ugly, with the two RS at the end. It was a provocation against oldschool names that all sound the same.

What makes a piece good?

Damn hard to answer. Some kind of feeling, whether it's a burner or *a quick thing. It can be really crummy, but still have soul. I* think the surroundings contribute a lot: it's nicer on trains. And it's nicer on a street in New York than on a street in Jönköping.

Is there anything bad about graffiti?

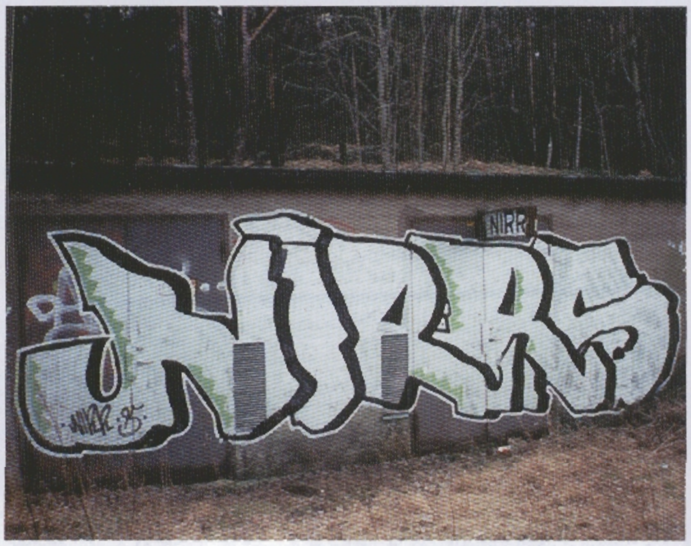
Well, the only thing I can think of is the consequences, like getting too many fines. You choose how much you want to write, adapt it to how much time you want to spend on it. And writing without a mask isn't a good idea.

What inspires you?

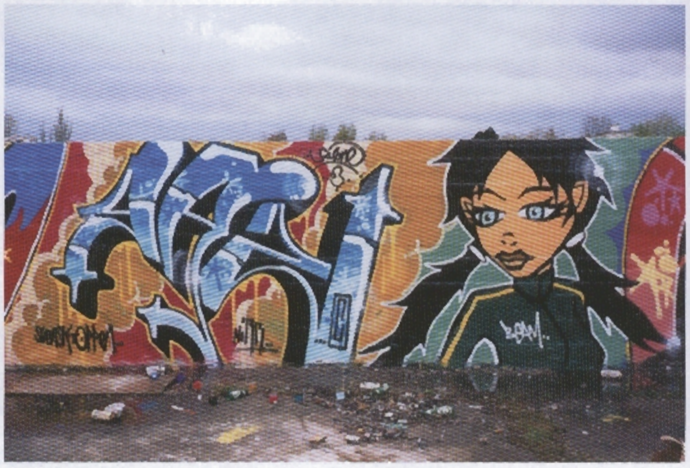
To me, it's probably all the other writers and friends around me that keep me going. The social side. I would probably have quit if I were the only one left writing. I write a lot for other writers and I love to see their stuff. The old times are important. I feel as though I would like to relive them, but it can probably never be like that again. Sometimes I do pieces the way I would have wanted to do them when I was ten or eleven, but couldn't do then.

Do you have any outside interests apart from graffiti?

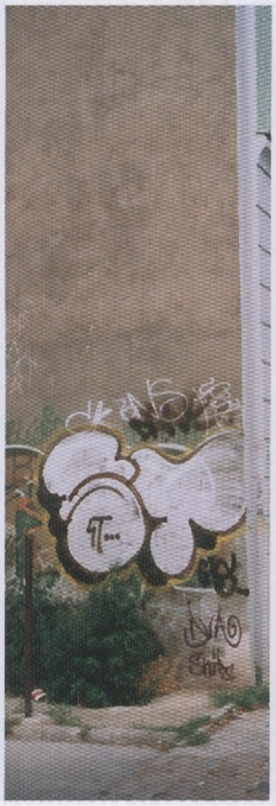
Music is a great interest. I play in bands, we do real old-style rock. Then of course I like graphic and creative design.

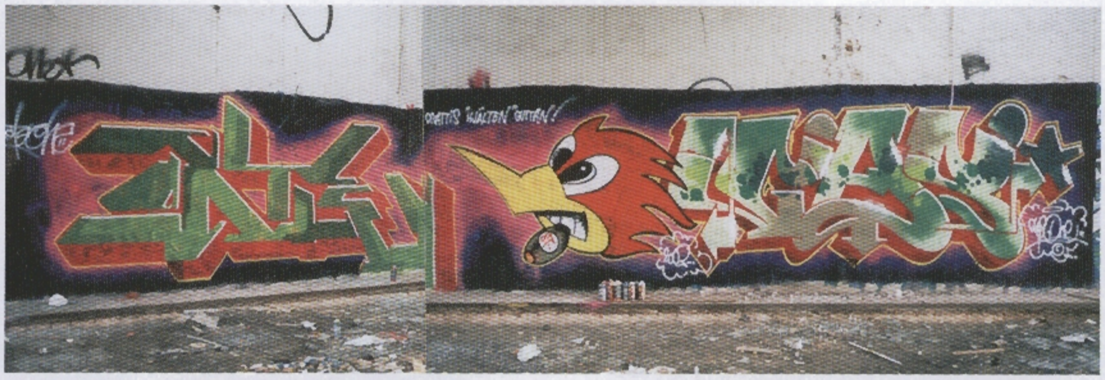


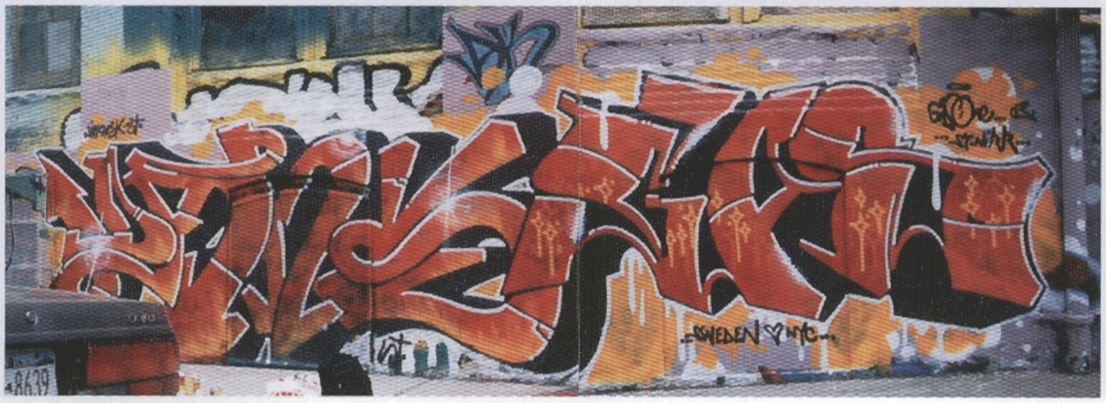
Nirrs by Gas – 1995

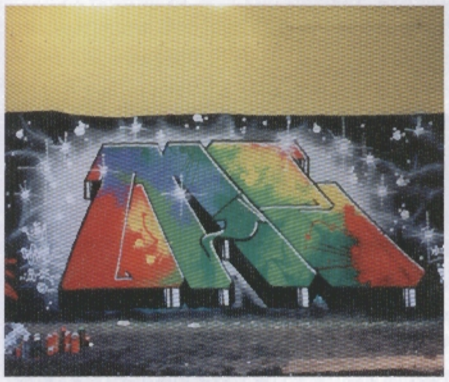


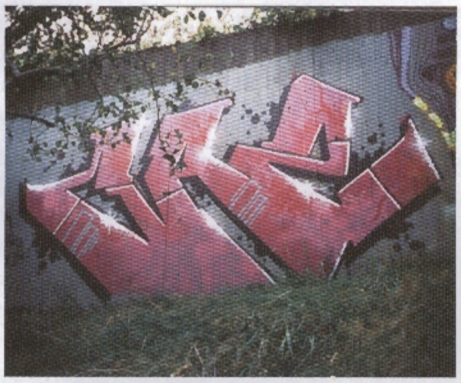
Gaz, character by Beam – Copenhagen 2003


St – Berlin


Akte, Gas – 2003


Dans, Gas – New York 2003


Gaz – 2003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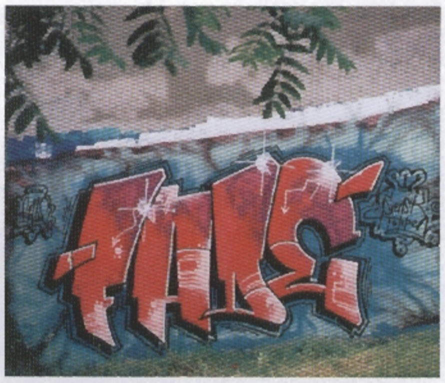
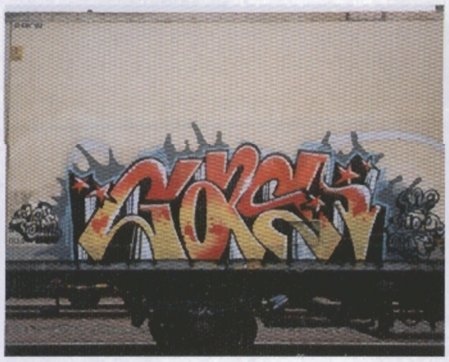
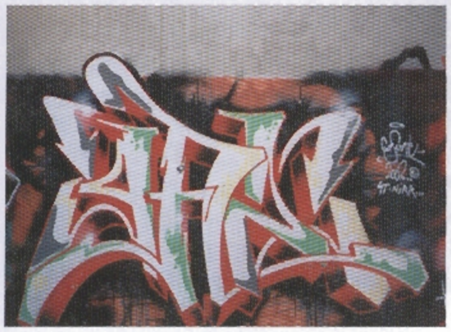

Fade – 2003


Gas – 2003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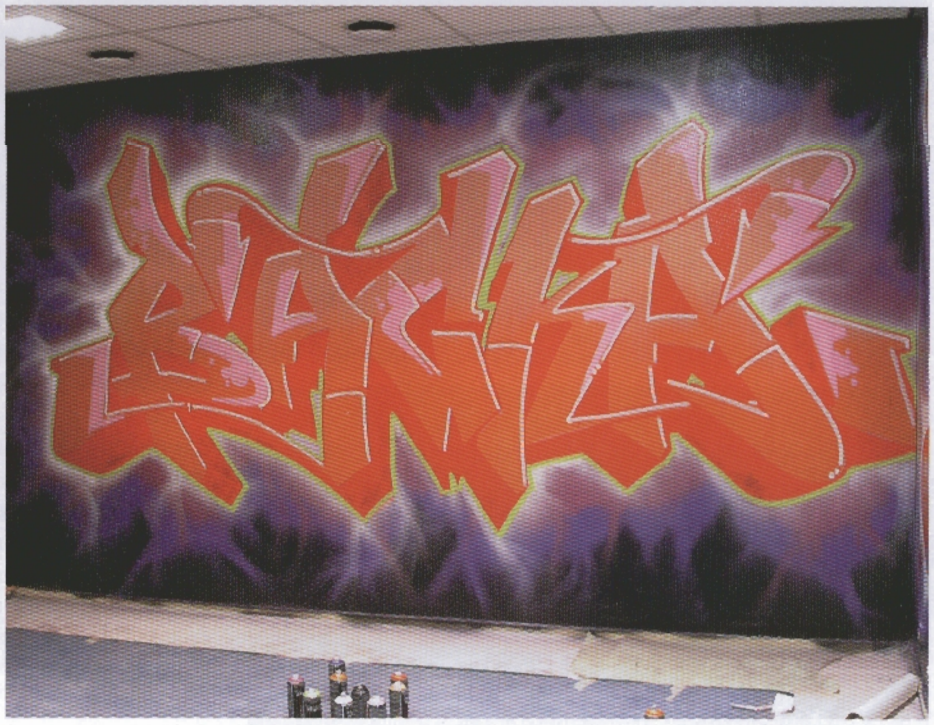
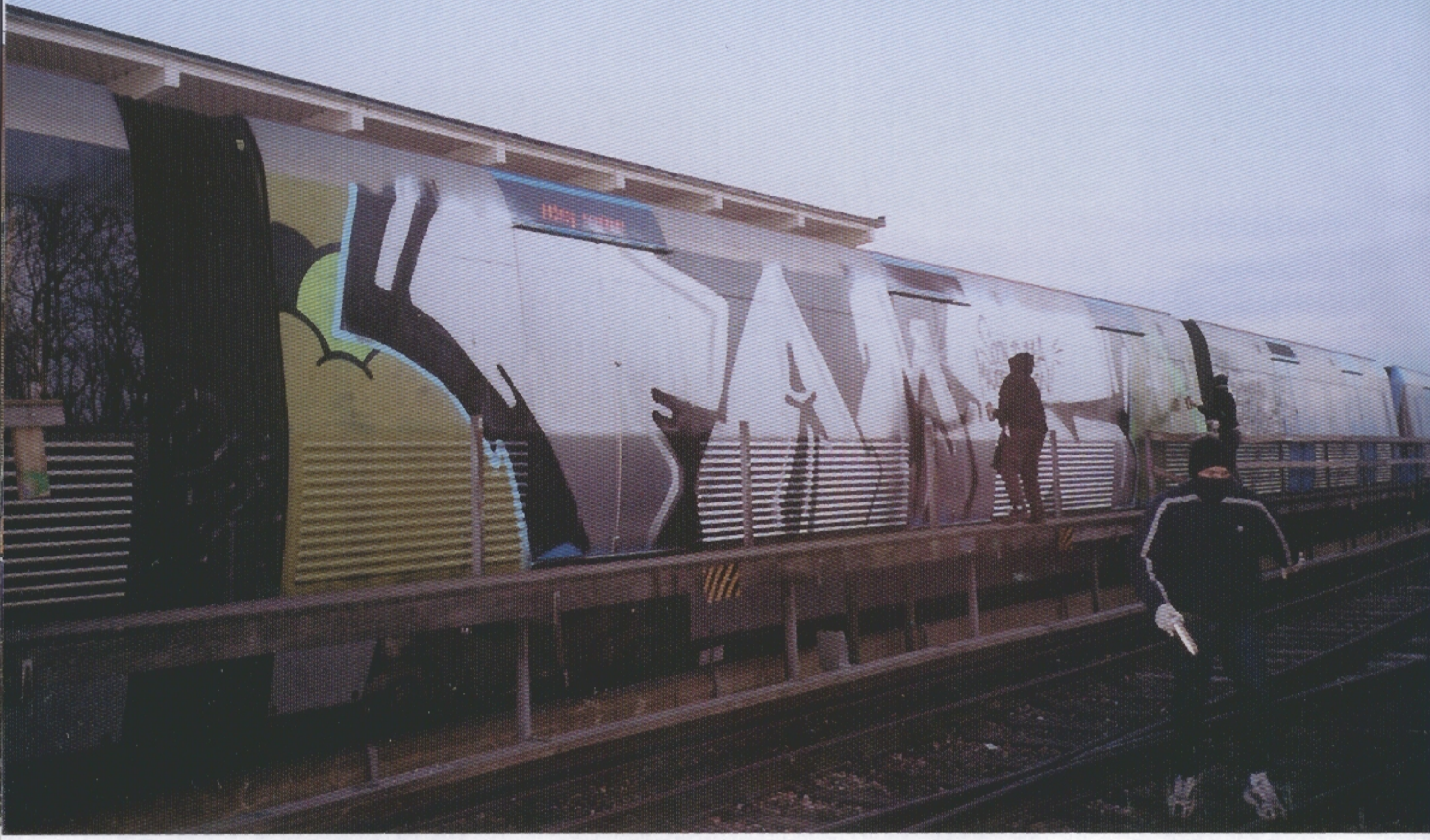

Backa – 2003



Fame – 2003. This and the other pieces on the following pages were made in 2003 and 2004 by different members of the Fame Crew.

Fame-crew revisited

Anybody who is interested in Swedish graffiti will know Fame Crew. Since we wrote about them in UP issue 24, they've doubled in size and have done masses of new pieces. So we decided it was time to talk with new members Onee and Whel. We also asked Skar about his view on graffiti after he suffered a severe assault soon after the crew was founded.

Why did you decide to bring in four more members to Fame?

Skar: For a while, it was almost only Roxy who did any writing. I hardly do anything since I got assaulted. So we felt it was time to enlist some new writers. We had thought about bringing in Whel and spent a lot of time with Onee, 7-Up and Rail, too. They were nice guys we liked to spend time with, and also, they wanted to write regularly.

How long is it since you were assaulted?

Skar: Almost two years.

Are you still suffering any incapacity?

Skar: Yeah, I am. My head was crushed with an iron bar. I was in a coma for two weeks and in a wheelchair for a few months afterwards. My body is still physically weak, since all my muscles atrophied when I was in hospital. And I take medication for my brain. But mentally I've got the urge to write. I get a real buzz out of hearing about the others doing a piece. I want to be in there too. Sometimes I come along and keep watch so I can do my bit.

What has changed since the others joined?

Skar: I think it's been really positive. Fame is our common denominator, and the name appears more now.

Did you others hesitate to join?

Whel: About a year previously, Roxy told me that I could join if I moved to Stockholm and wrote a lot. So it was quite expected, and just fun.

Fame is seen as a crew from the Norrland region of Sweden. But of the new members, only Whel is from Norrland.

Skar: It just turned out that way because we all came from Norrland. But you can't just carry on as if it were some kind of Norrland race. You've got to be open to new people, too.

What are your other interests beyond graffiti?

Whel: Not much. Mostly graffiti, really.

Onee: The time in my life is mostly spent between work and my girlfriend. Then I try to write as much as I can beyond that.

Skar: After I got assaulted, I got a broader view of things. Sure, it's great fun to run around writing, but I've got very much into open-air stuff, like walking in the mountains. Going off to Lapland, sitting chilling in a hut with no electricity or running water.

Have you done that?

Skar: Yeah, I was out camping in Norkap last summer with a writer who signs himself Jamie.

What makes a piece good?

Whel: That it's got some verve to it. Simple but zingy.

What is characteristic of a Fame piece?

Skar: A lot of glitz and glamour.

Onee: Yeah, a lot of color. And characters are good, too.

Skar: It has to be stylistically pure. When you see a piece along the tracks or on a train, it goes past very quickly, and you have to be able to see what it says. It can't be a snake pit with 18,000 colors on everything.

Whel: Just one fill-in color and one background color can do.

How do you make it glitzy and glamorous with just two colors?

Skar: Well, you've gotta practice.

What's bad about graffiti?

Whel: Fines and the fact that it takes up too much time…

Onee: Time you should really be spending on something else. Maybe not in my case. I don't want to come on like Whel's dad, but he writes an awful lot.

Skar: What can be bad about graffiti is that you can get locked into that

little world and don't think much about what's going on outside.

What inspires you?

Skar: What inspires me is being out with friends writing. Sitting in the subway car keeping watch, then seeing the result and the rush of joy over this being something that will travel.

Whel: I was in Oslo last week, and right now I'm inspired by a lot of the graffiti scene over there in Norway. They have cool trains, and it's hard to write there. It's fun to see the ones who write a lot there and do cool stuff.

Are you inspired by the fact that they write a lot despite its being so hard?

Whel: Yes, and that they write so much. **All Crew**, for instance: they really own the whole city in every way. I think that's powerful. Then I'm quite inspired by **Vim**. They have a cool style, cool colors, and they've been around for a while.

Onee: As far as graffiti goes, I'm only inspired by other writers. It can be fun to try other people's techniques. Everybody has a certain kind of technique in their style. Like **Matador** does thin outlines with a lot of speed lines, while **Arsle** does heavy pieces with thick outlines. And it's an experience to try different ways of writing.

What's the difference between trying other people's techniques and biting?

Onee: Well, that depends on you. Some people place the bar quite low, but I think it depends on how you do it. Personally, I think it's biting if you just take what someone else has done straight off.

Does biting matter much to you?

Onee: It doesn't matter much to me. All of us that write are in this together, and the important thing is to have fun.

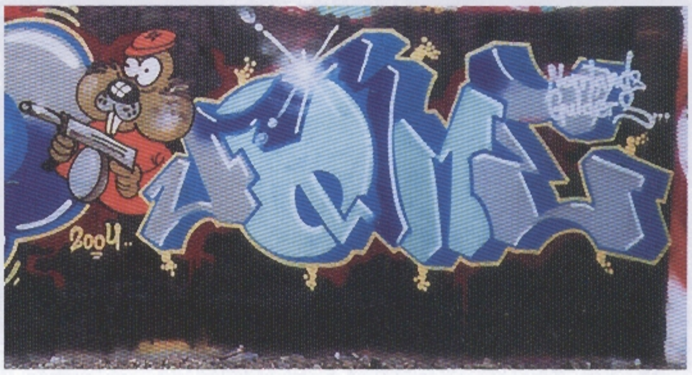
What motivates you?

Onee: Togetherness.

Whel: To do a lot as good as possible.

Björn Almqvist

Fame crew consists of: 7-Up, Ape, Onee, Plåster, Rail, Roxy, Skar, and Whel.



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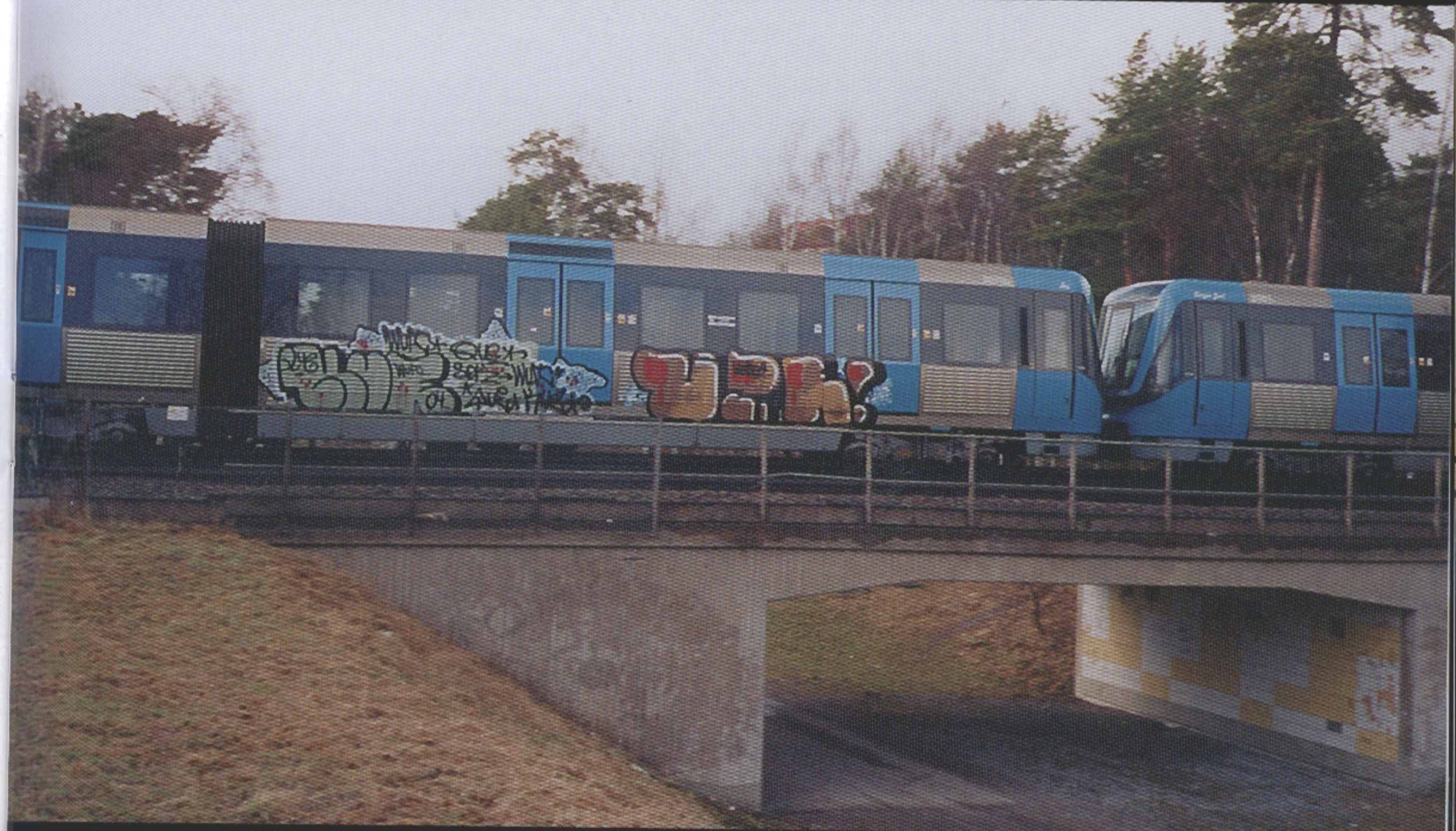
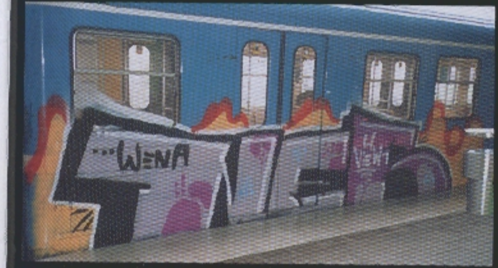
FAME CREW

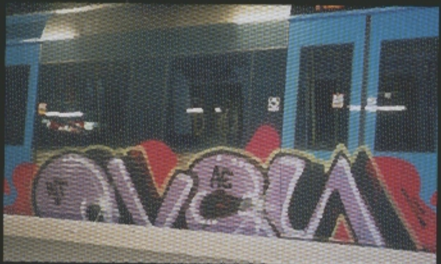


Kue, Uze – 2004

STOCKHOLM TRAINS



Ner – 2004



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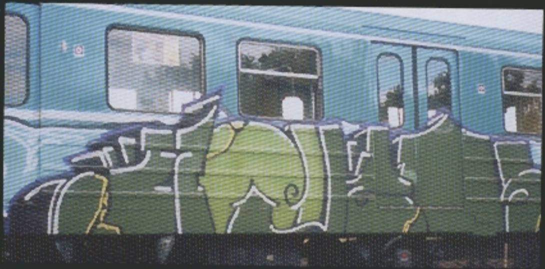
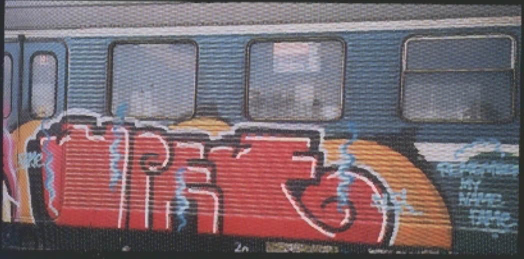
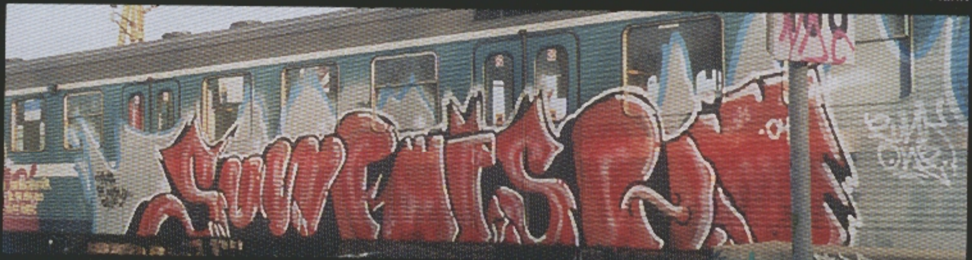


Hank



Upee – 2004



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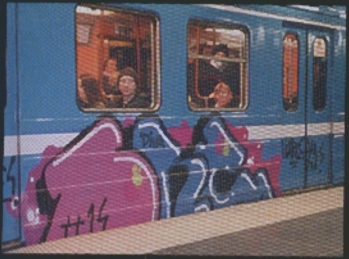

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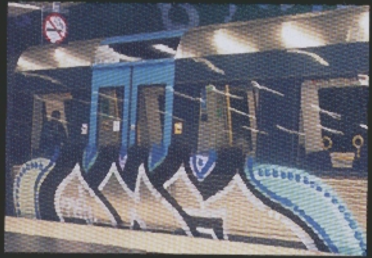
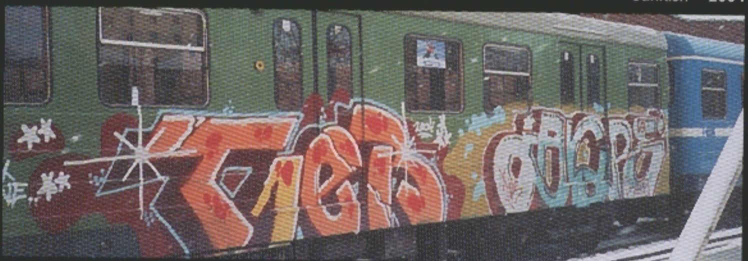
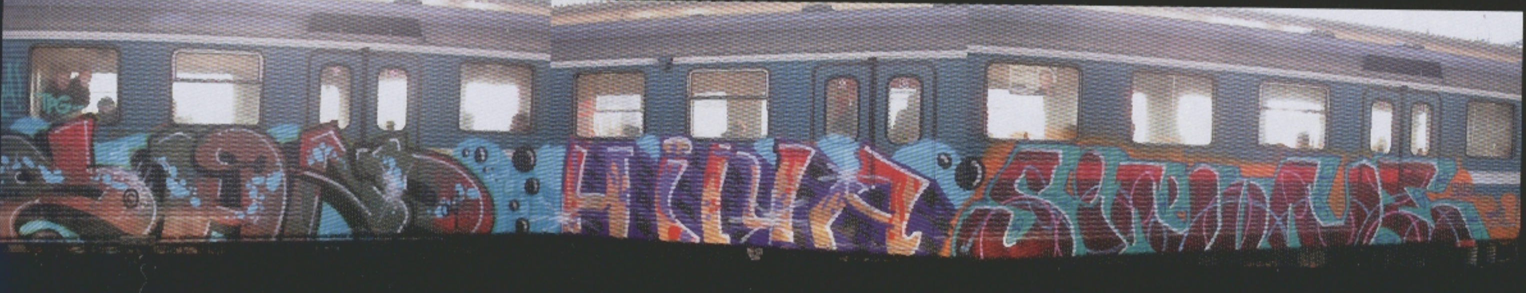
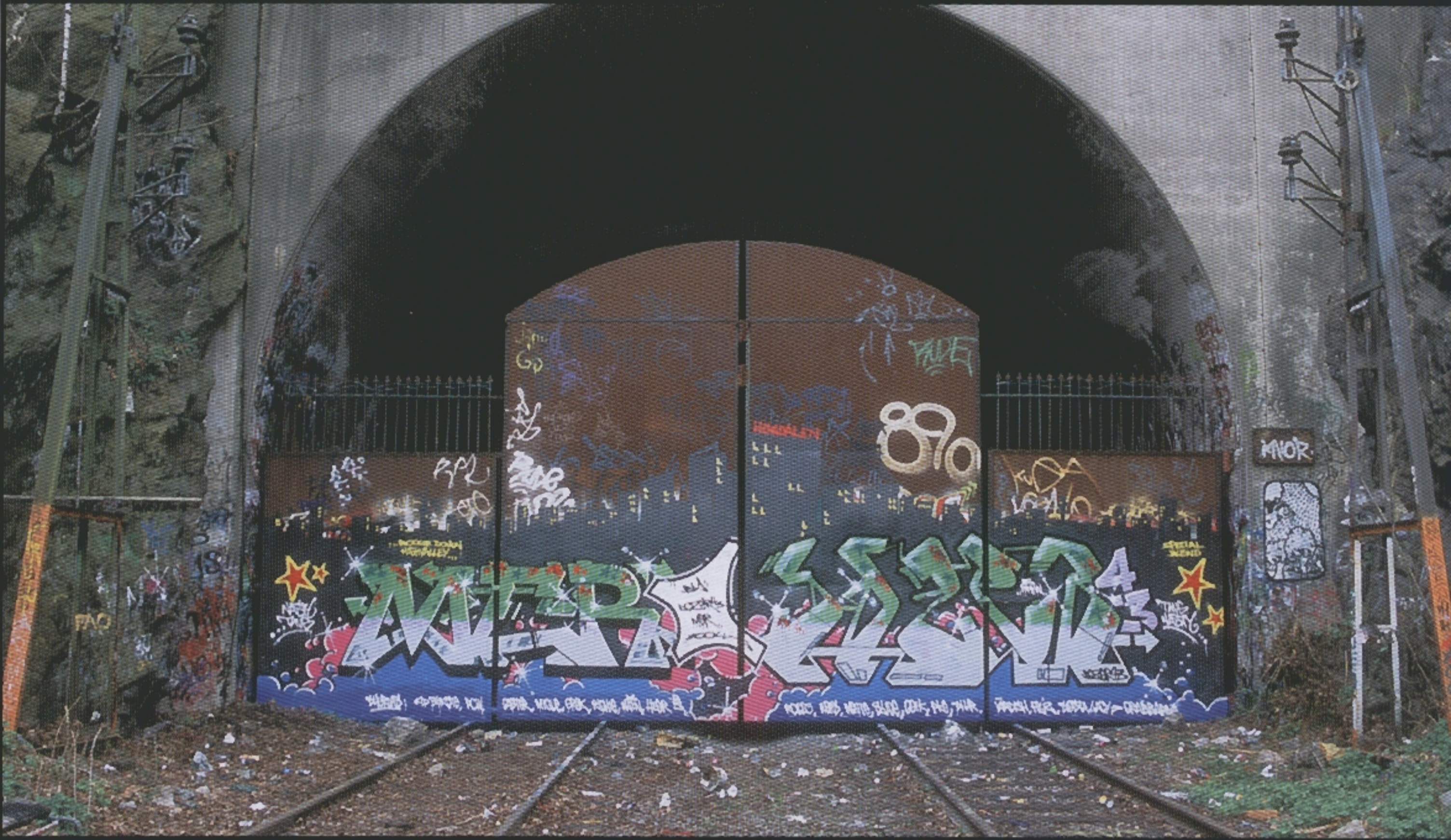


Ins – 2004



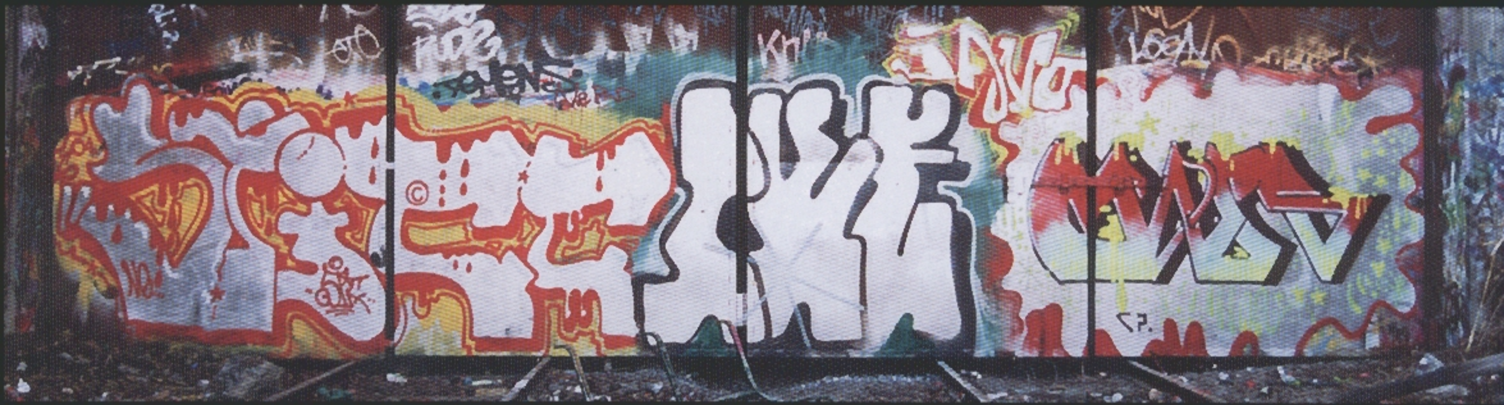
Tier, Adore – 2004



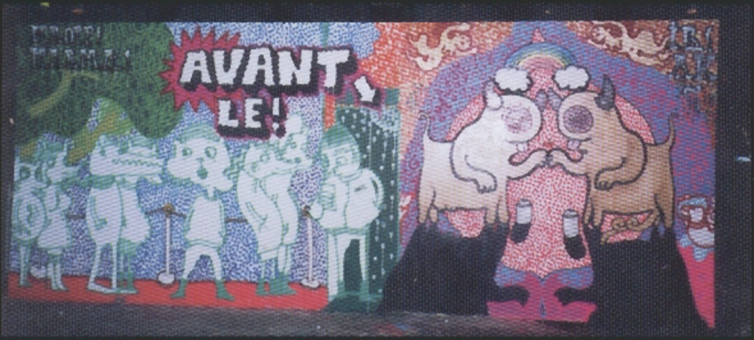


Mer, Doser – 200

STOCKHOLM WALLS



Stiff, Pke, Iano, Maes – 200



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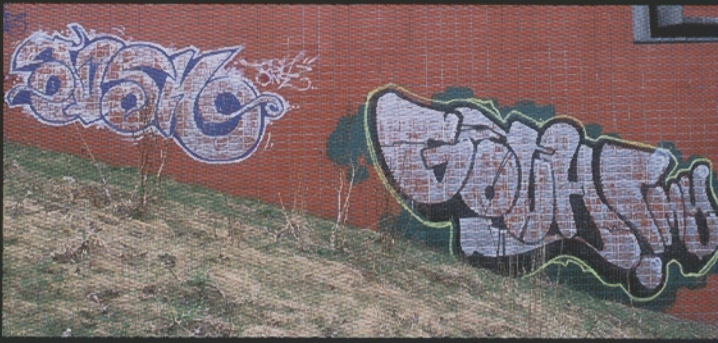
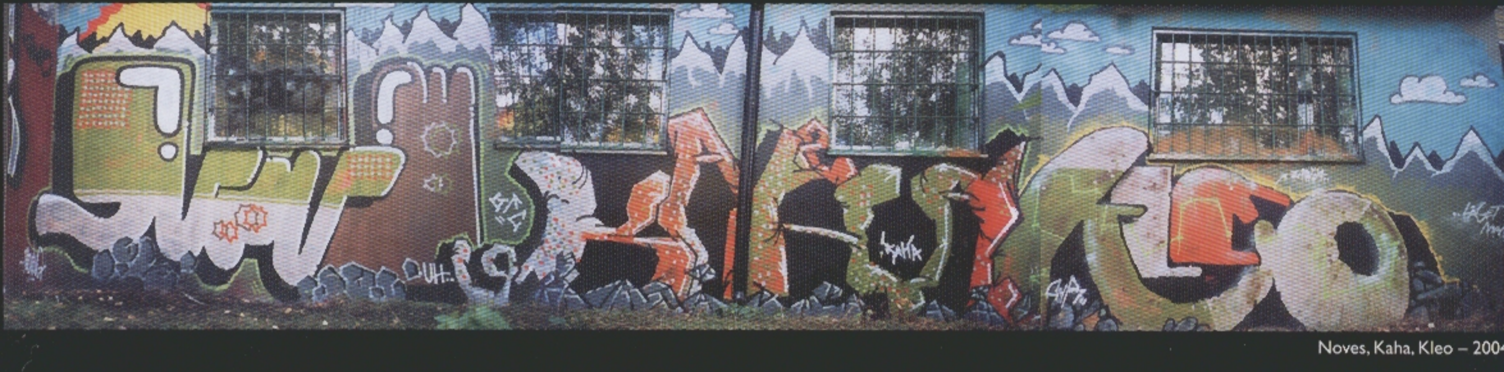
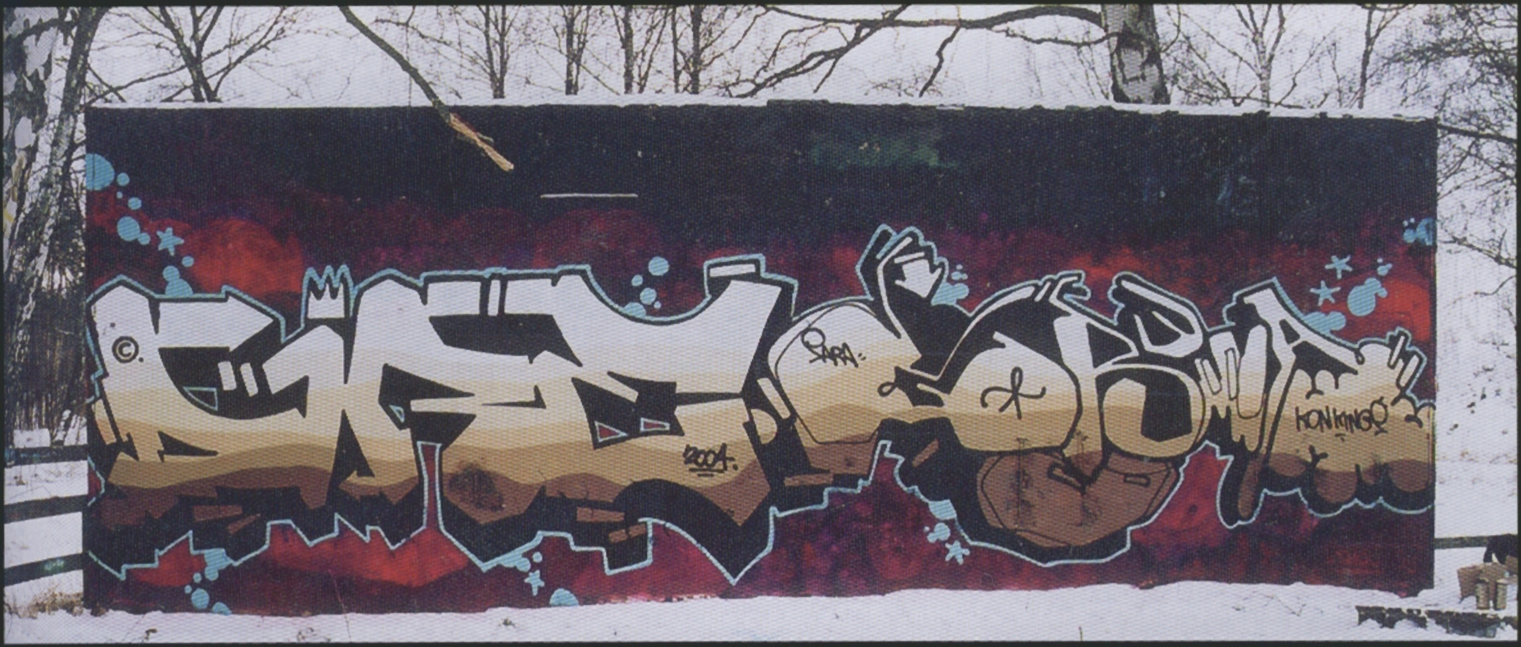
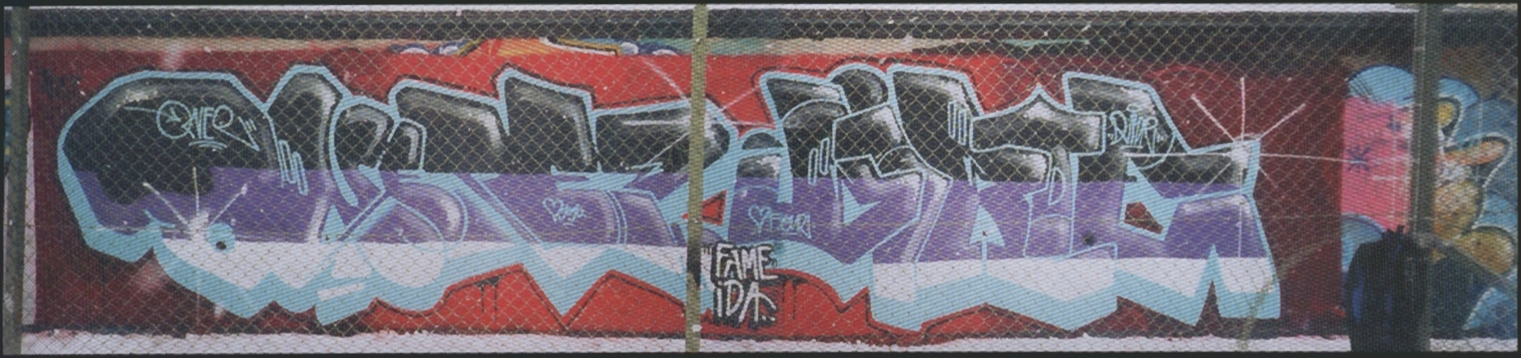


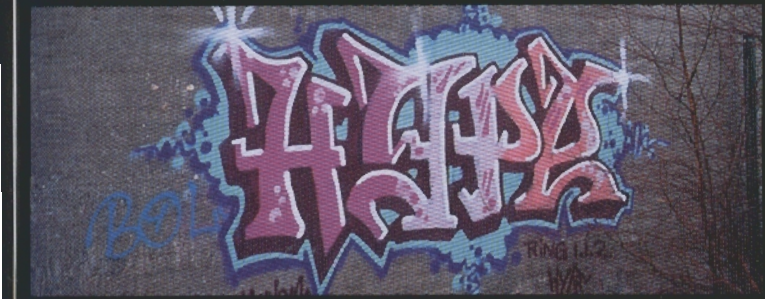
Tosh, Goth – 200

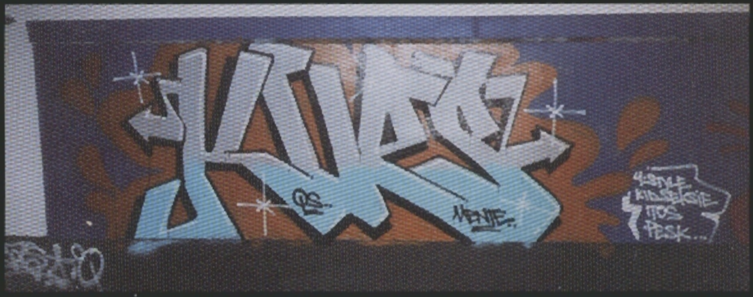


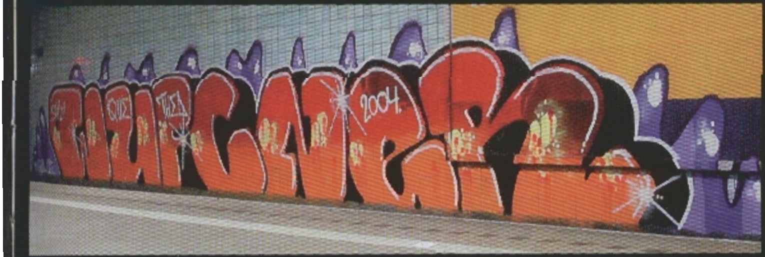
Noves, Kaha, Kleo – 200

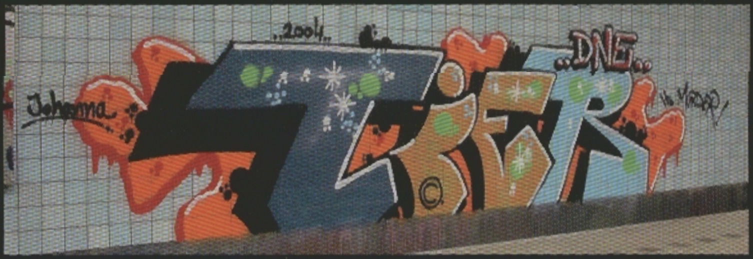

Dire, Gorilla – 2004

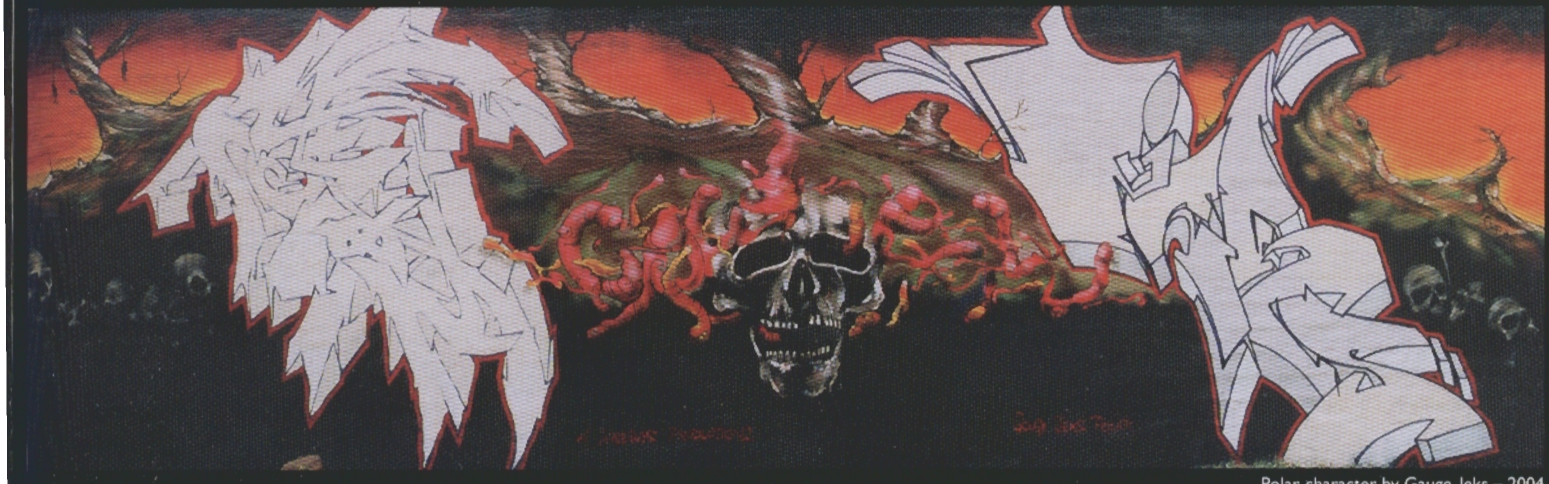

Onee, Dirte – 2004

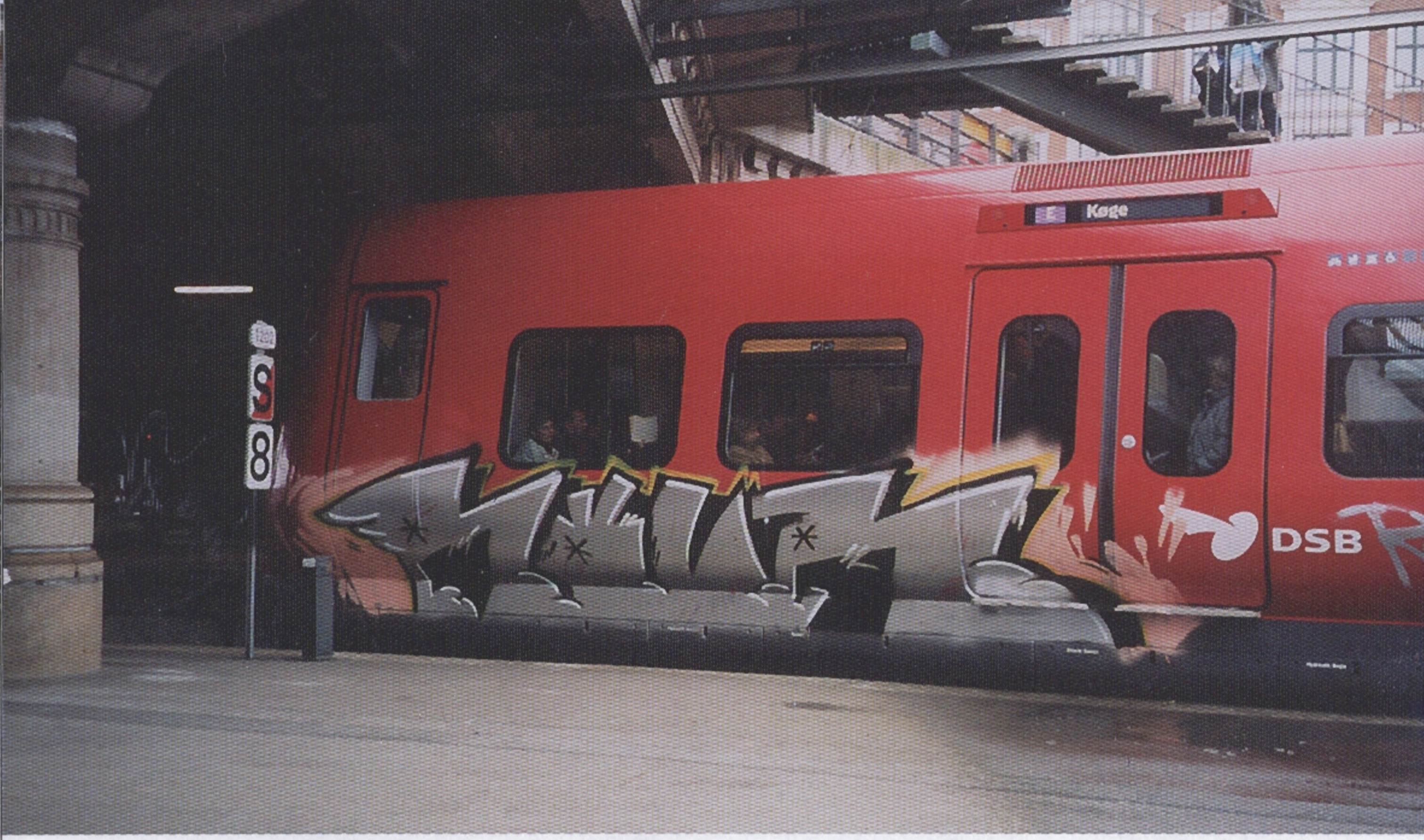

Hype – 2003


Kues – 2004


Wufc, Ner – Hötorget 2004


Tier – Hötorget 2004


Polar, character by Gauge, Jeks – 2004



Røver – Copenhagen

Røver Crew

The Danish graffiti scene is mainly represented by the capital city Copenhagen, but what happens in other localities is less known. Røver Crew come from Aarhus, in Eastern Jutland in Denmark, but often paint in Copenhagen too. UP spoke with Mix, and this is what he told us.

How long have you been writing?

Our crew has been around for about a year, so it's pretty new. We all started writing around 1997 or 1998 and have had different signatures, but now we're all in Røver.

How does the graffiti scene look like in Aarhus?

It is different here from Copenhagen. There's less train writing since there are no commuter trains. There are actually only about five or six active train writers here. I think too many people don't take graffiti seriously. They spend too much time chilling, drinking beer and going to Stenbron [a legal wall in Aarhus] five Sundays in a row. That's cool with us if it's what they want, but it's not enough for us. It would be nice to have a bit more competition, like in Copenhagen.

Apart from that, I like the the attitude most writers have in Jutland. In Copenhagen, many people have too much of an ego and play it up. They think you don't know what a train is just because you come from Jutland. I experienced that just two weeks ago in Copenhagen, and the guy had only painted half as many trains as me! Of course, not all Copenhagen writers are like that, we know some who are really cool. But here, people are just more relaxed. There's more cohesion among writers here, and that's how it should be: us against the system.

What inspires you?

All the members of Røver care a lot about style, and we think it's important to have one of your own. We're probably mostly inspired by places like Poland and Germany. We really like crews like **Khc**, **Bad** and **Ewc**. But we also get inspiration by Swedish writers like **Rilo** and **Marr**. They're good, especially when you know how little time they have to do their pieces. A piece like that gets so much energy! We often go writing in the Aarhus yard, where you mostly get five to ten minutes. That's why it's nice to go to Copenhagen, where they've got some really quiet yards.

What makes a piece good?

What makes a piece good is that you can see the person behind it, what he's doing. The best piece isn't always a forty five-minute panel, a five-minute piece can be better. But style's the most important thing.

What motivates you to go out and write?

The exciting and fun things that happen to us motivate us. We've had so much fun over the years that it keeps us going. Sometimes it's hard to think of anything except graffiti! The brain gets stuck on graffiti. Fuck work, fuck school, fuck everything… Graffiti! We love it!

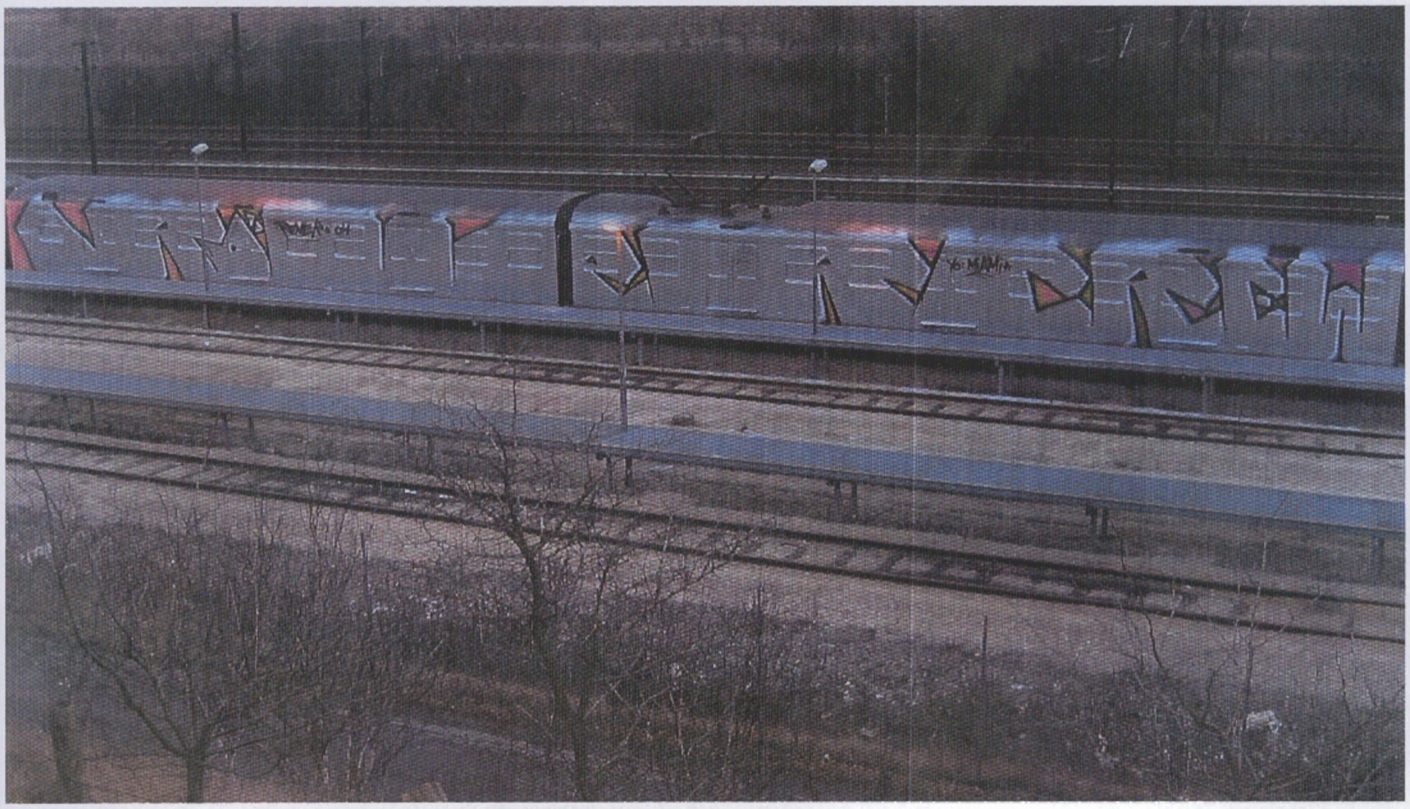
Is there anything negative about graffiti?

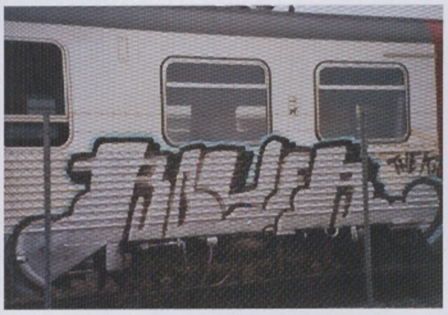
The bad part about graffiti is that it is so time-consuming that it can be hard to keep up with school and work. Family and friends are at the bottom of the list. And graffiti is expensive. I haven't got a job because of my record, so I live on what I steal. It can be pretty hard sometimes. But the other crew members have jobs.

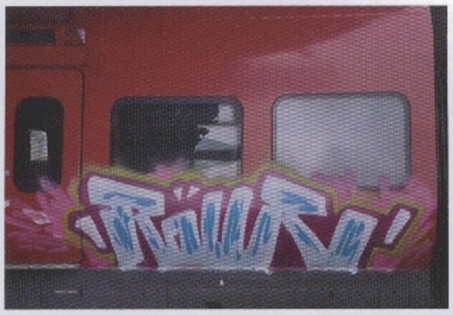
Do you have any interests outside graffiti?

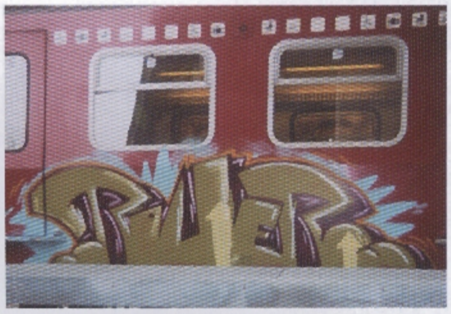
Oh, yeah, of course. When I'm not writing, I spend time with my friends, because that's important too.

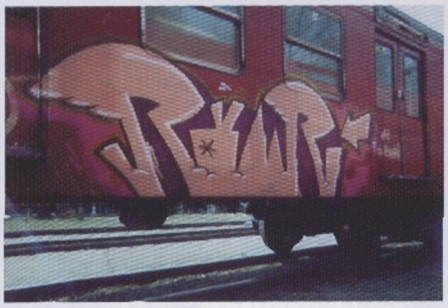
Iknow, Mix – Whole train, Copenhagen 2003

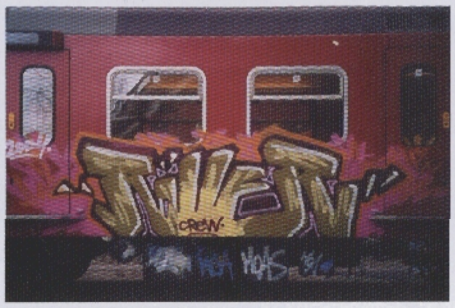

Røver Crew – Copenhagen

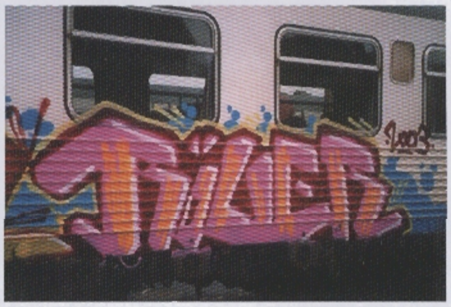

Røver – Denmark

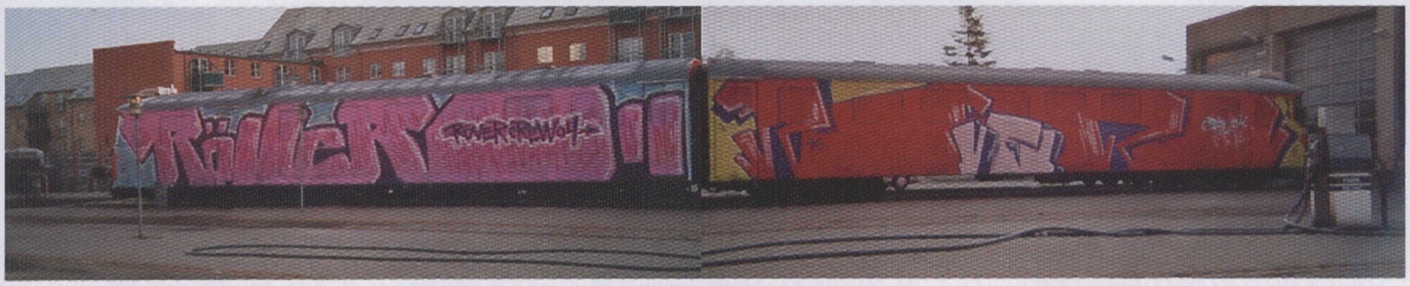

Røvr – Copenhagen 2004

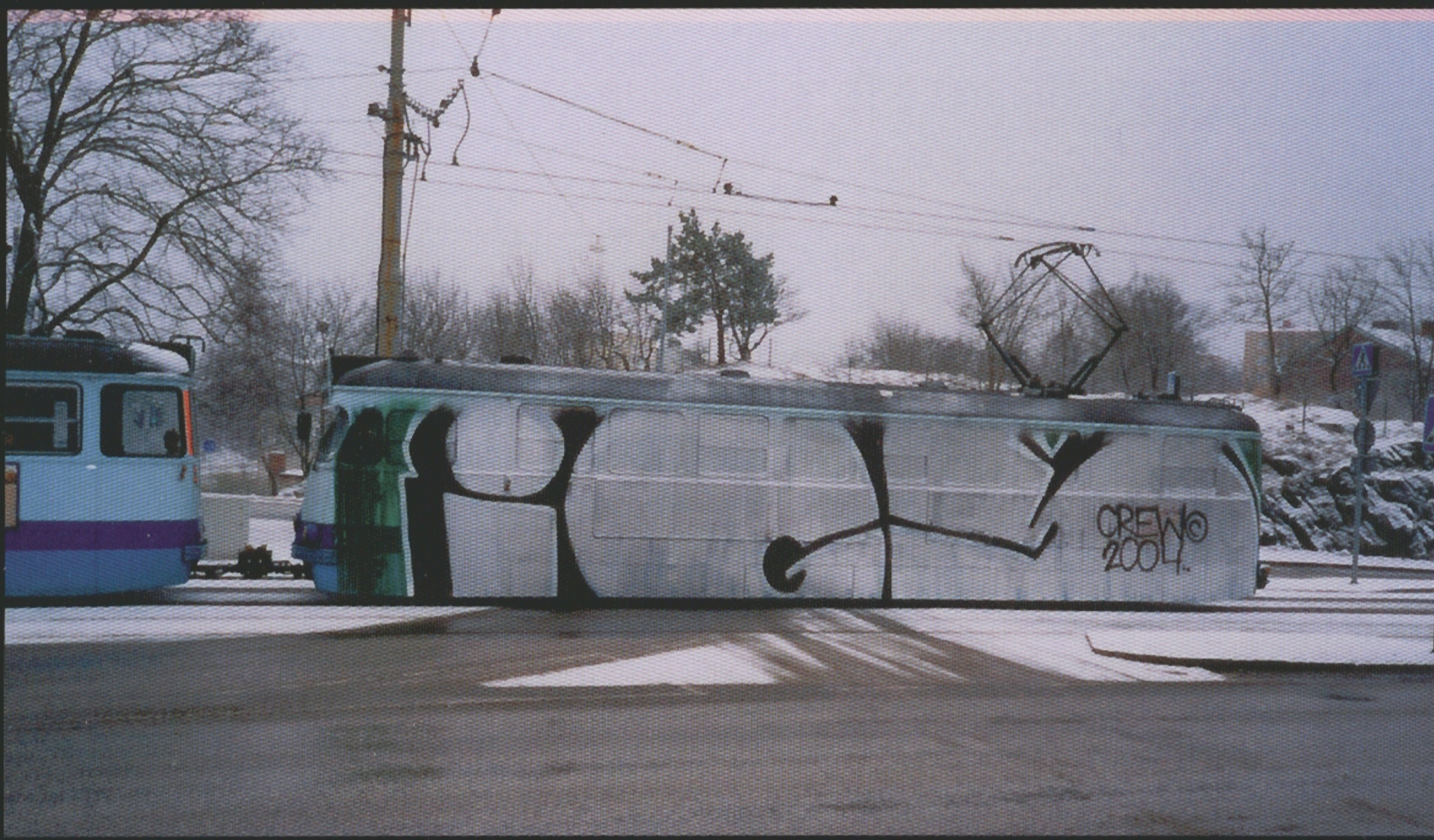

Røvr – Copenhagen


Røvr – Copenhagen 2004


Røver – Copenhagen 2004

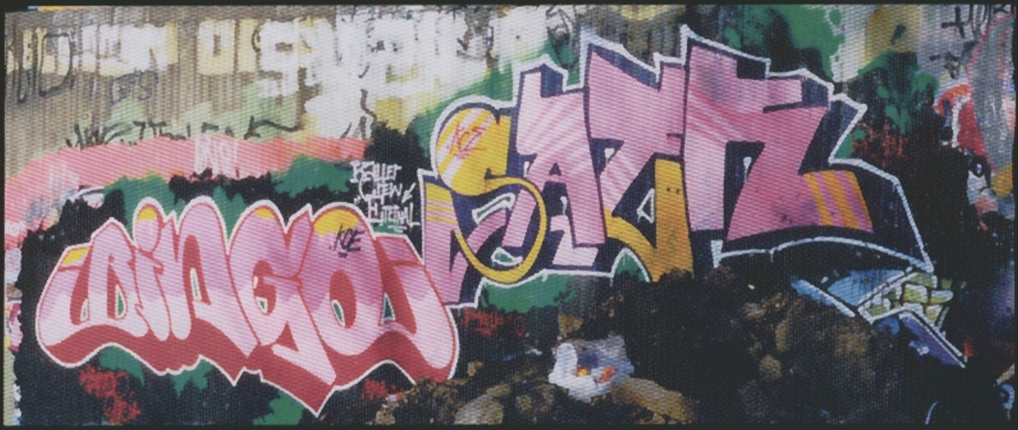

Røver – Denmark 2003


Røver Crew – Denmark 2004

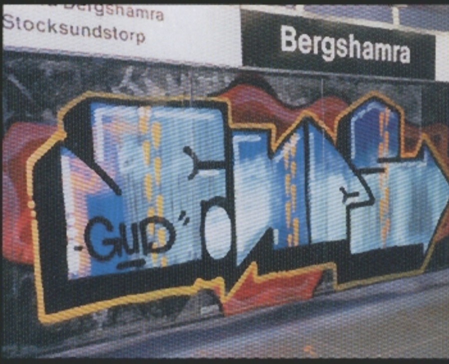


Igs – 20

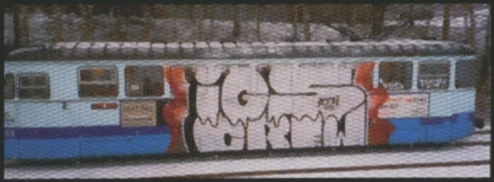
GOTHENBURG



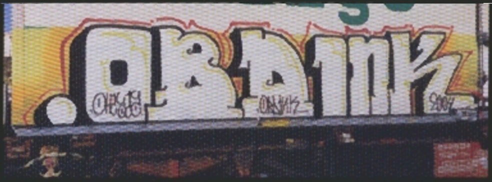
Bingo, Saek – 2004


Stocksundstorp
Bergshamra

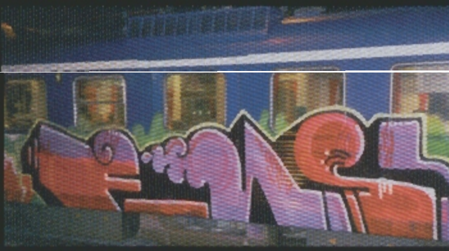
F-Ups – Stockholm subway station 200



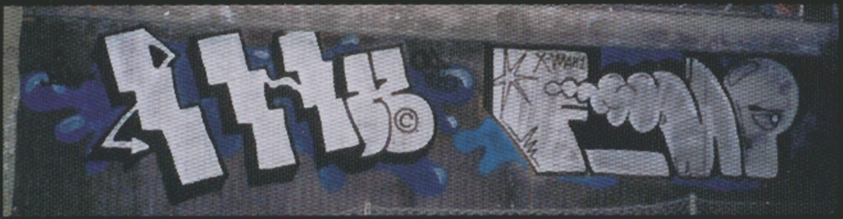
Igs crew – 2004



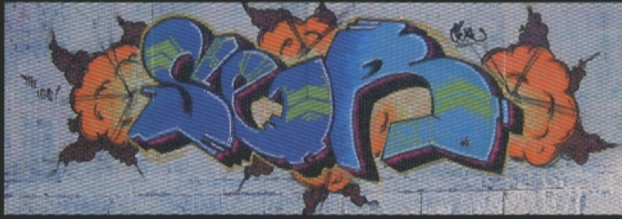
Obd, Ink – 2004



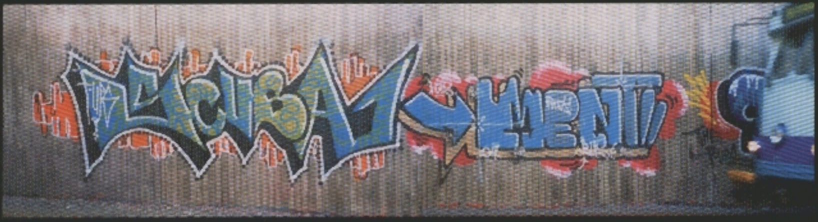
F-Ups – 20



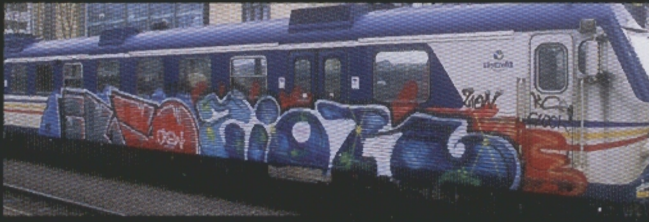
Ink, F-Up



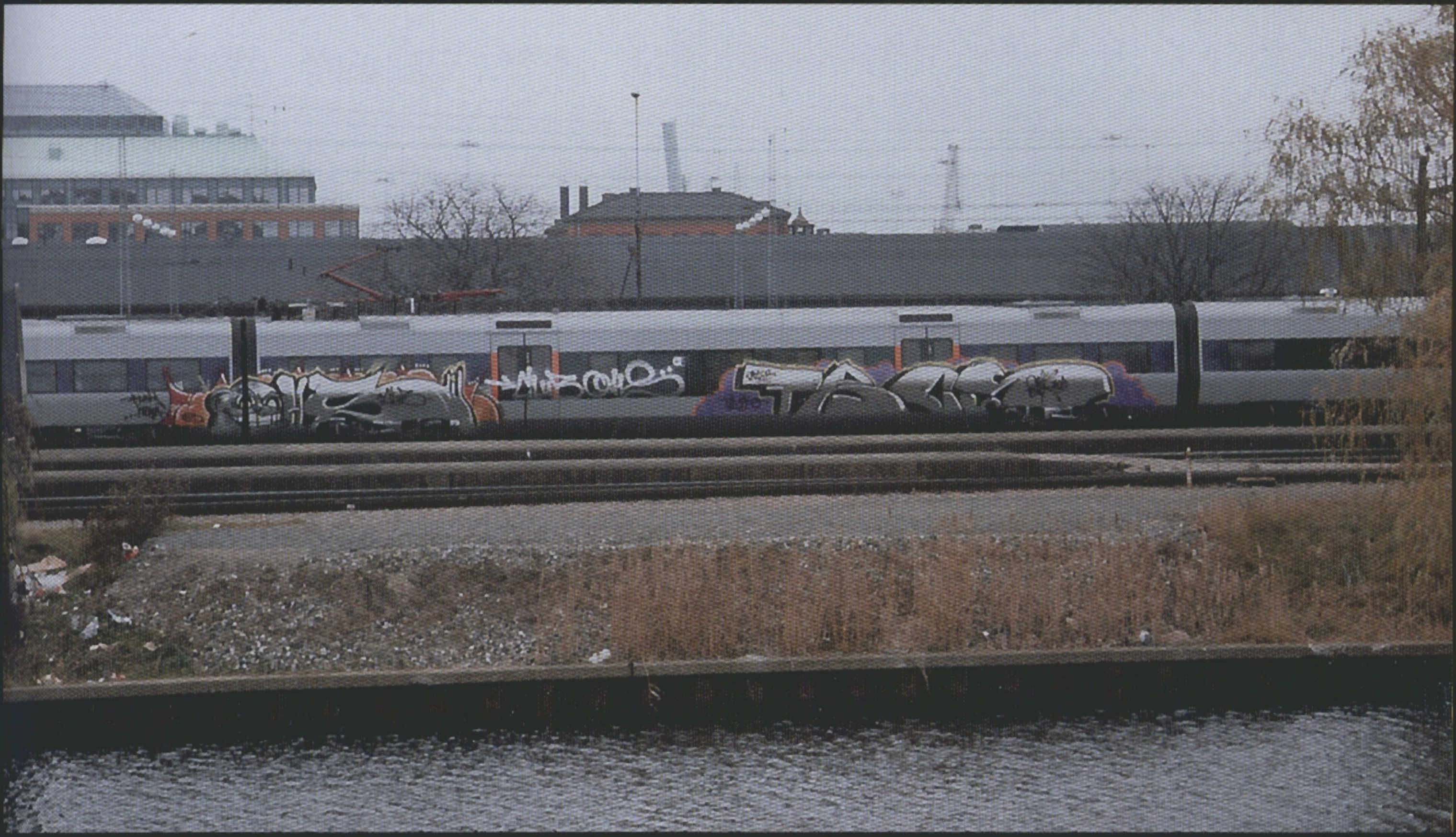
Ser – 20



Scuba, Ment – 2004

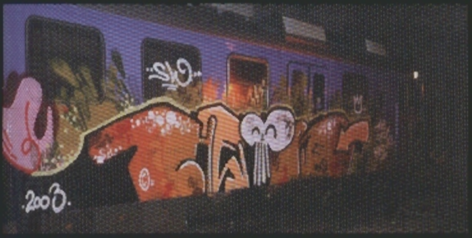


Igs, Zion – 20

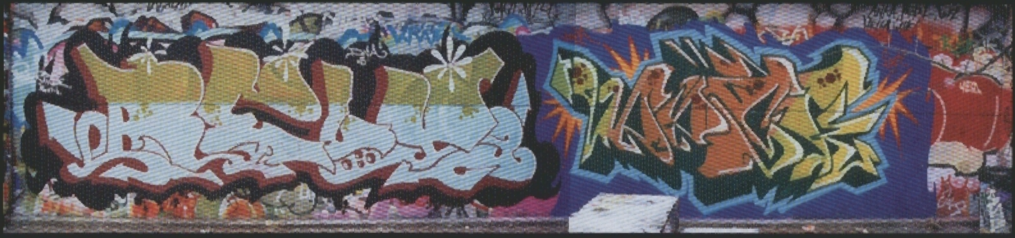


Ohs, Trc – 2004

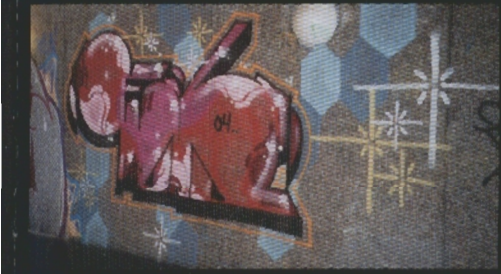
SCANIA



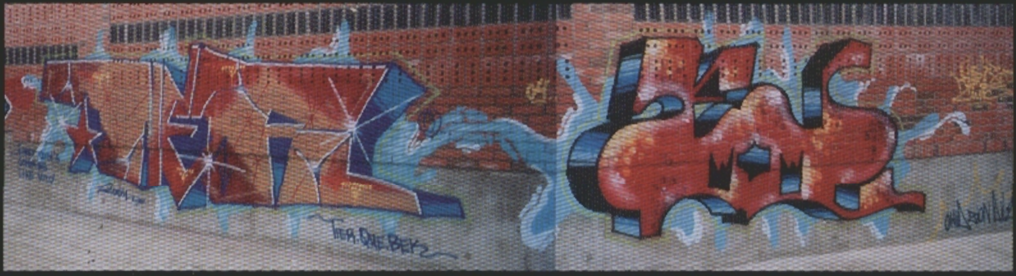
Heor – 2004



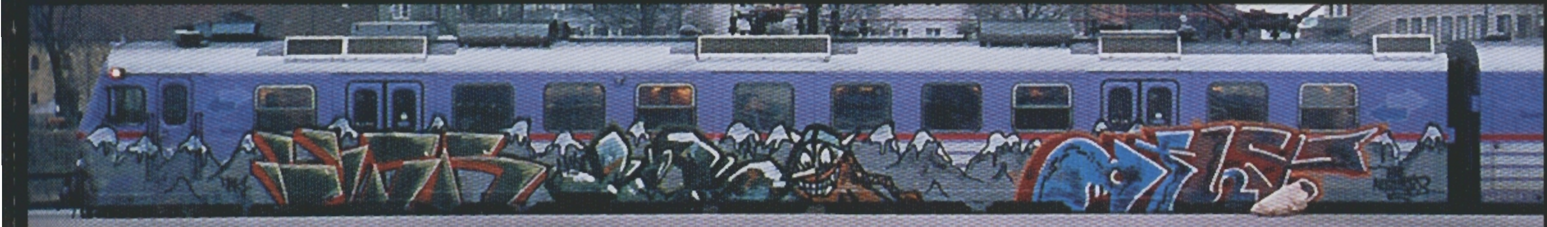
Rely, Besk – Lund, 2004



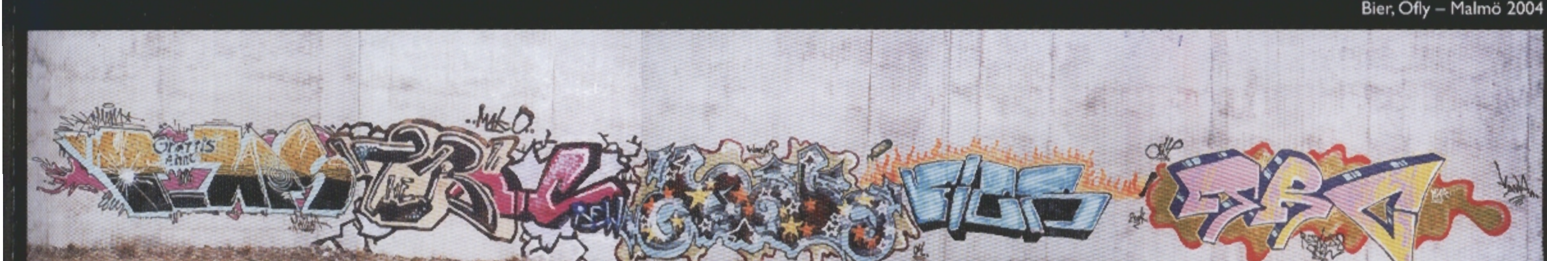
Fool – 2004



Ner, Fool – 2004



Bier, Ofly – Malmö 2004



F-Ups, Trc, Fool, Bier, Trc – 2004

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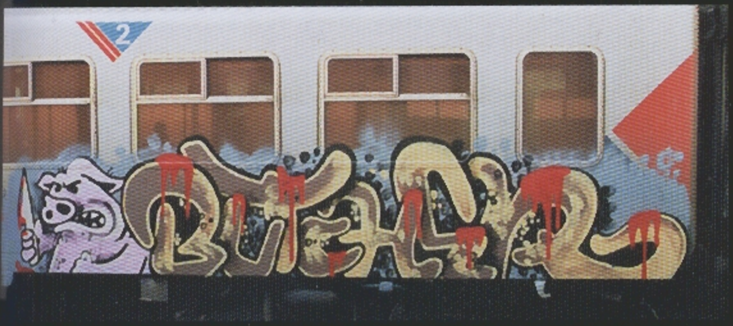
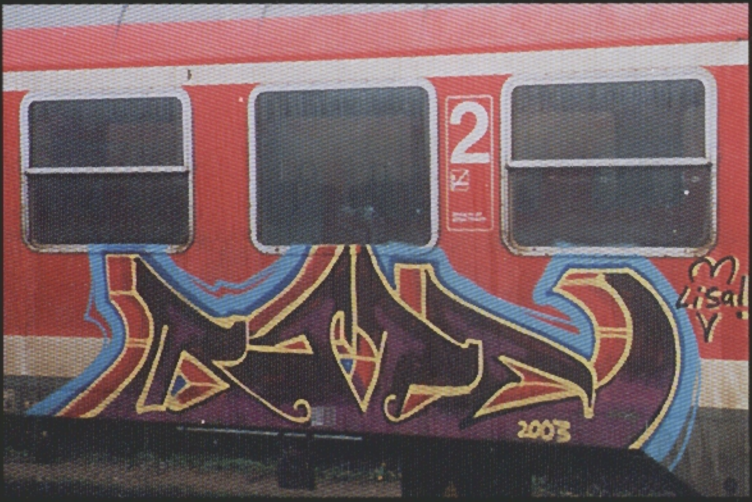
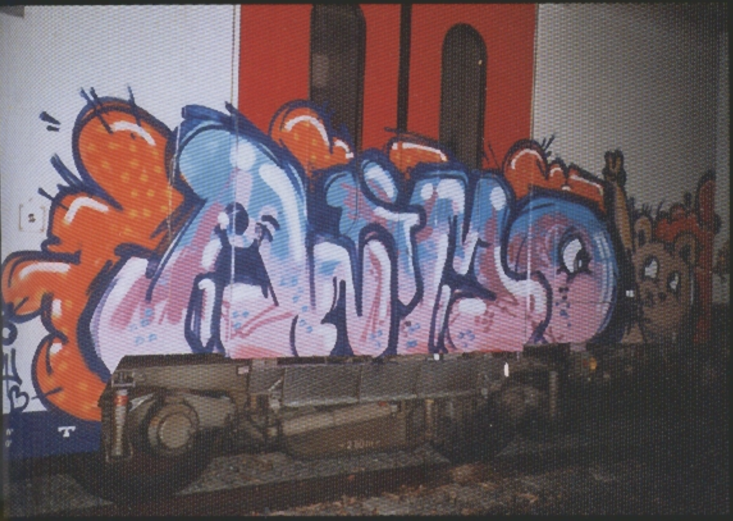


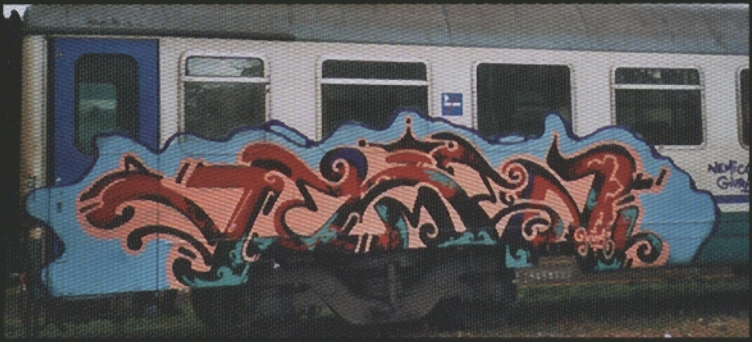
Butcher – Belgium



Rape – Germany 2003

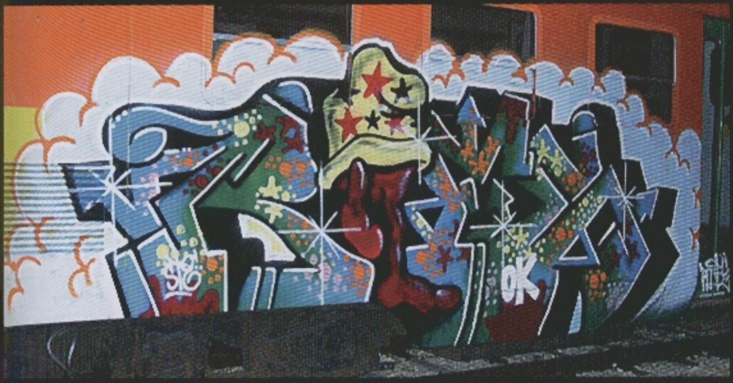


Animo – Belgium

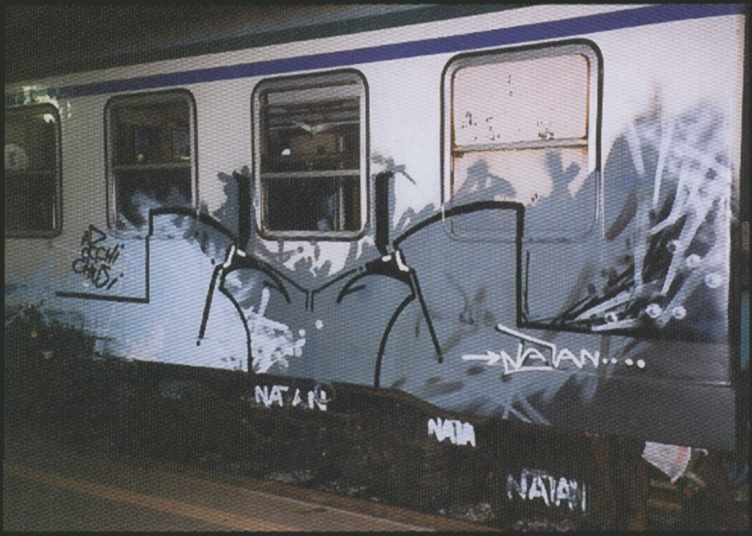


Yemen – Italy

EUROPEAN TRAINS



Rife – Italy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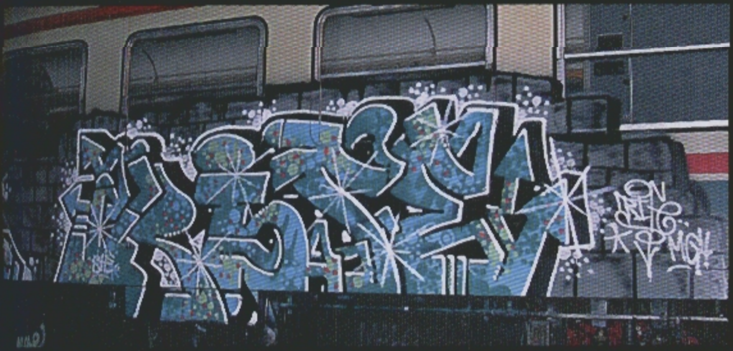
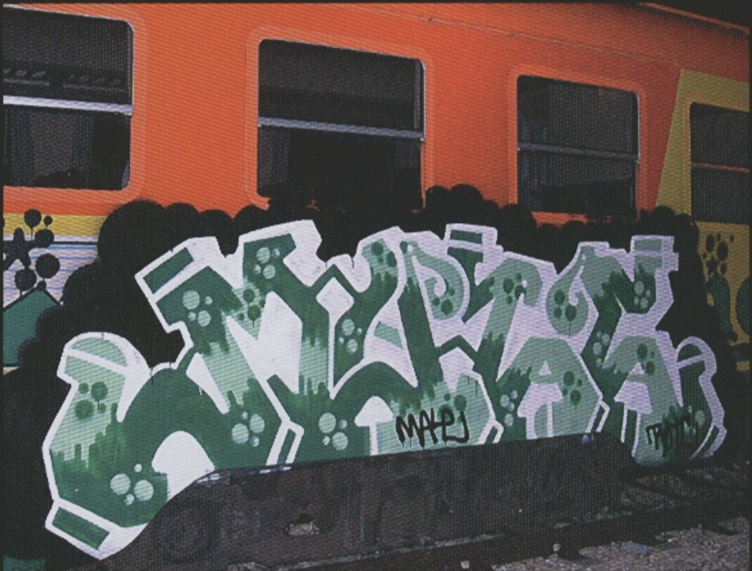
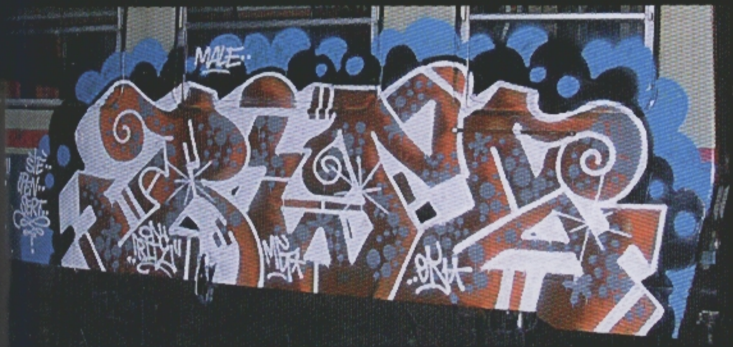
Natan – Turin, Italy



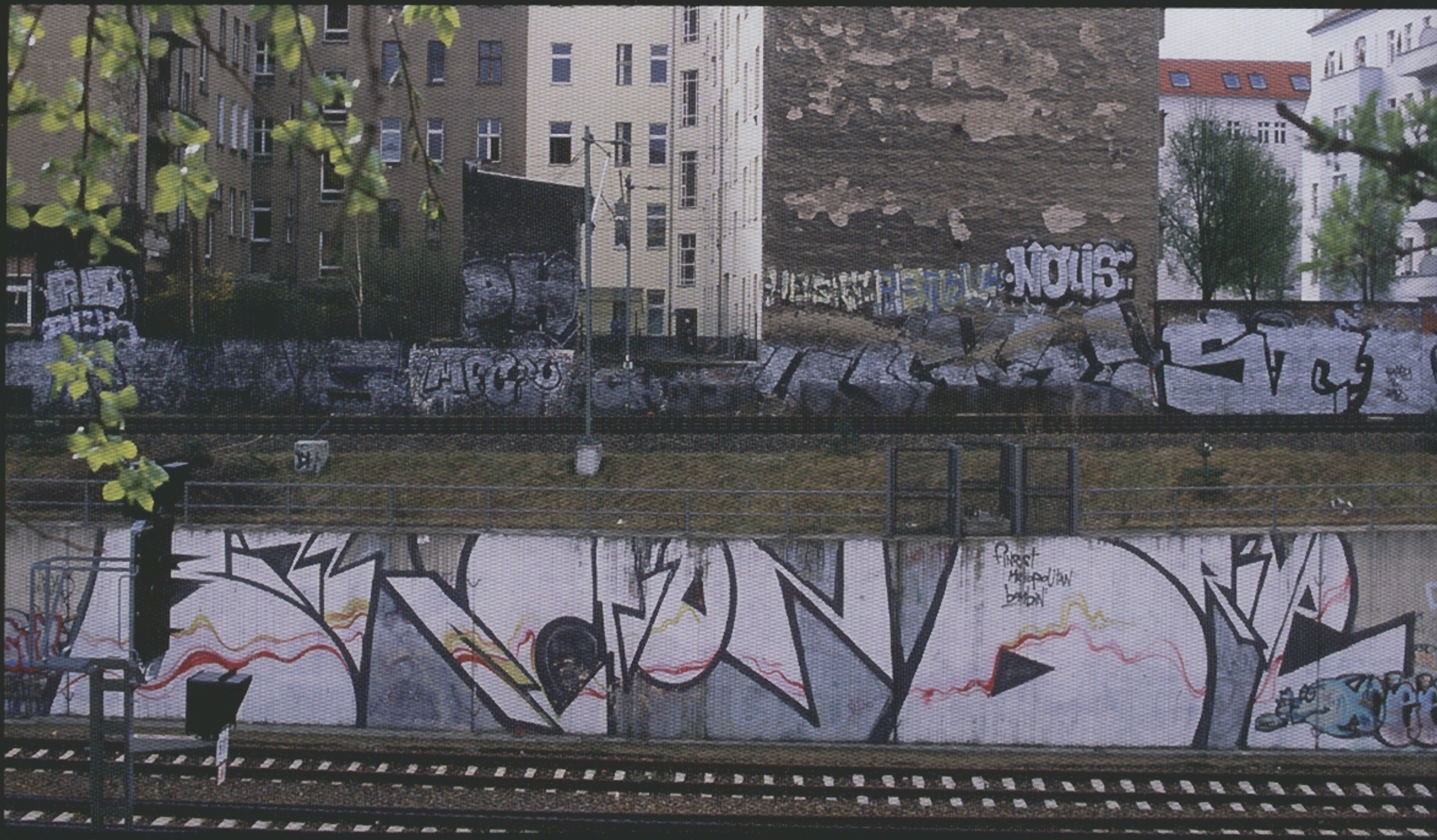
Rife – Italy



Male – Italy



Rife – Italy



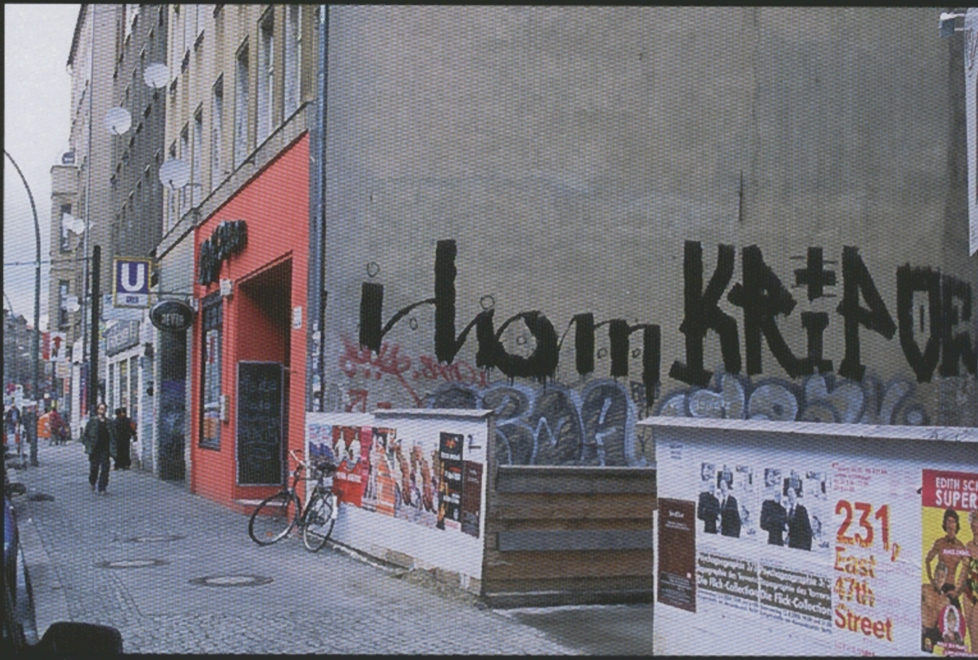
Bizz Action Drive. Note the size of the letters at the right of the E. That's a piece of normal height– At the ring line.

BERLIN

Much has happened since UP last wrote about Berlin in issues 22-23. The city is still on the verge of bankruptcy, and unemployment is just under twenty per cent.

Berlin is in the same situation as New York in the 1970's. And this may lead to interesting things. Imagine what New York of the 70's gave us – the DJ culture, and with it, disco, rap, electro, breakdancing and, of course, graffiti.

Despite the city's poor economy, graffiti is removed from trains quite quickly. But there is a great number of writers who mainly write on the streets. New tags and pieces constantly appear. Here is a taste of what you can see on the streets in 2004. Most of the pictures were taken in north Berlin, where a fairly original tag scene is developing. There are some references to Sao Paolo with roller tags, and others are in a kind of updated oldschool style.

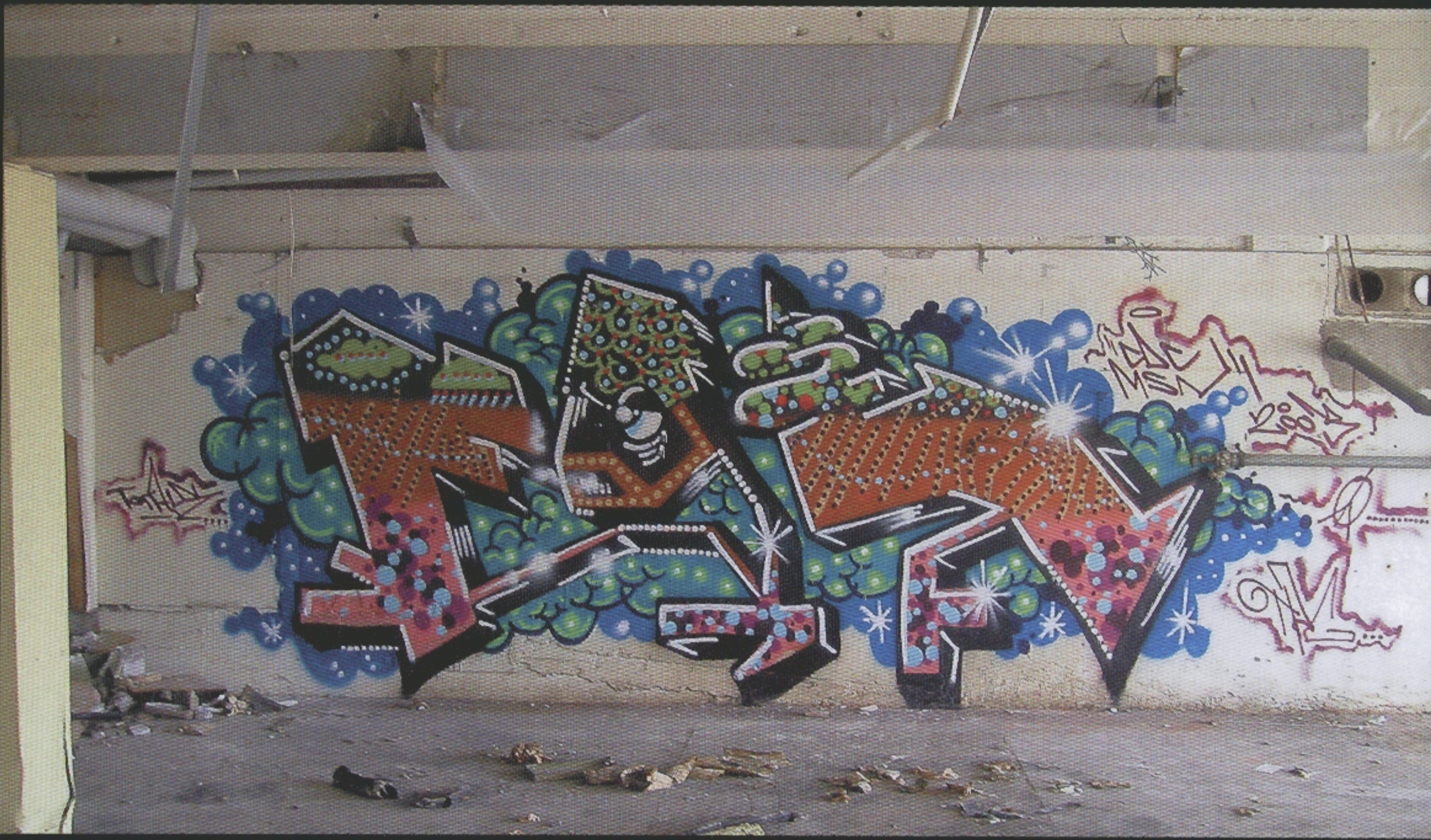


Idiom and Kripoe showing roller skills.

The wall is freshly rebuilt. Soon the scaffolding will be dismantled and the pieces will remain.

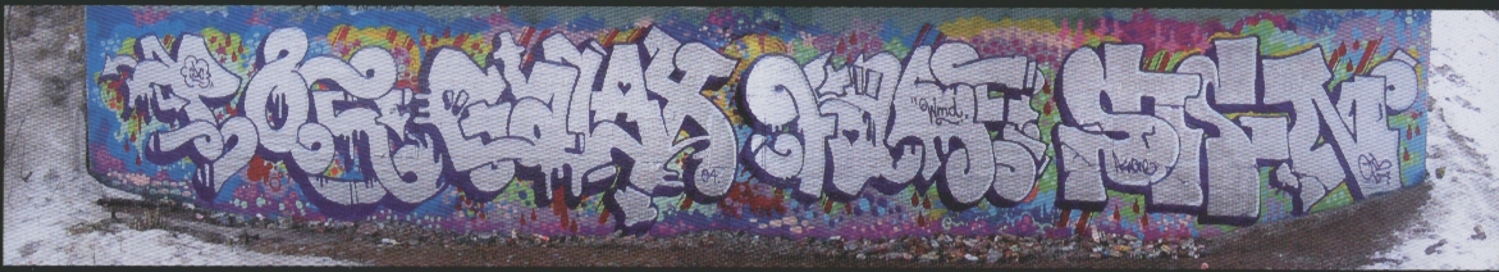
Fight Nazis & Cops. This piece, about two stories high, sometimes gets painted over. But it always gets repaired.

I WONT
DIE IN
SILENCE
your lost soul....

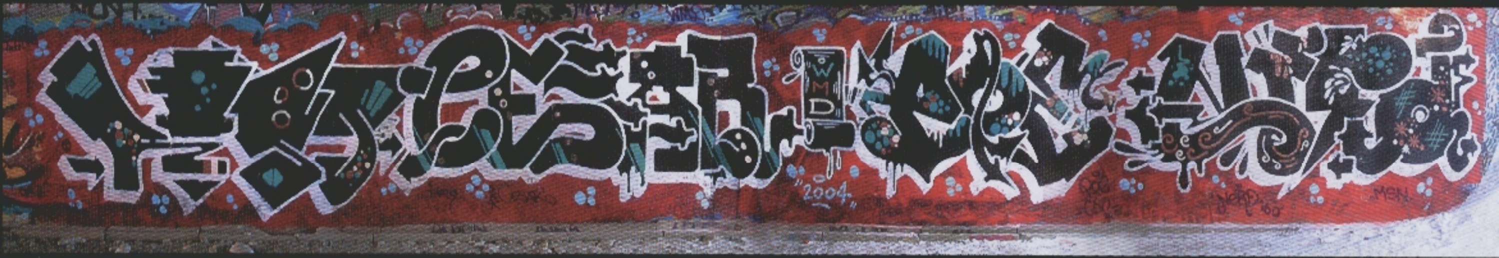


Egs – 200

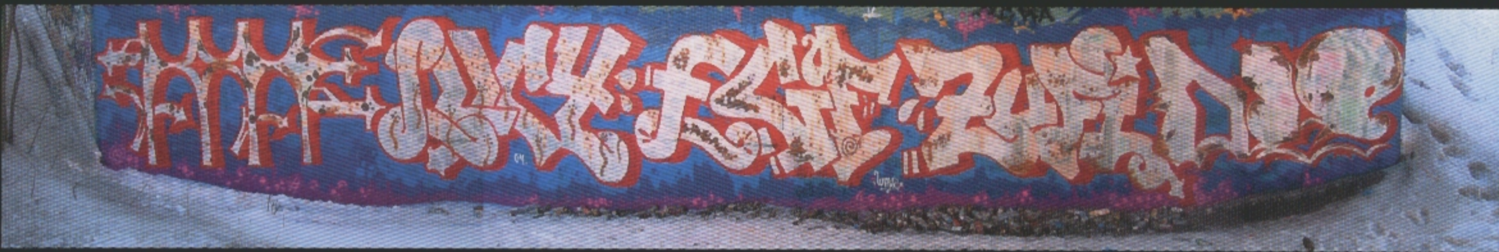
FINNISH WALLS



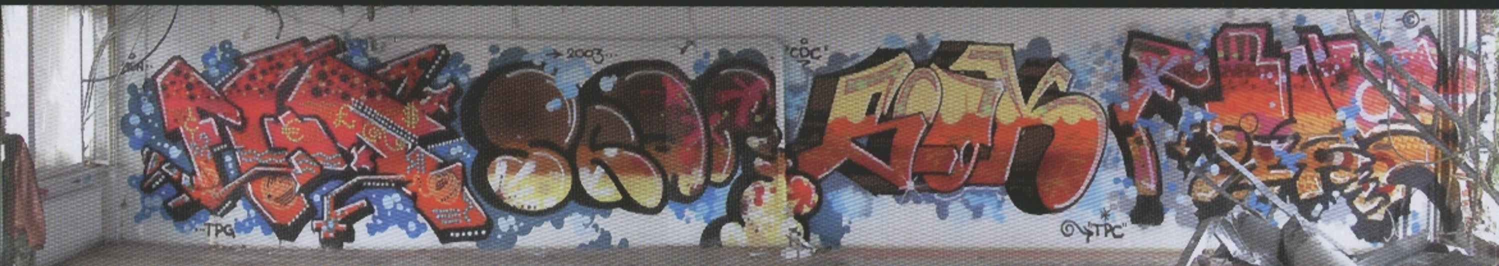
Poe, Galax, Fame, Sign – 200



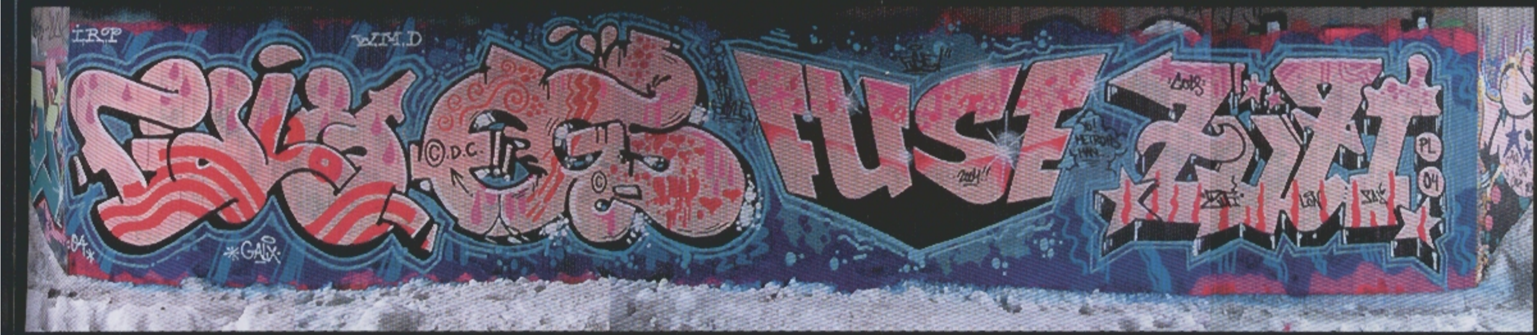
Rest, Cesar, Poe, Nerd 160 – 200



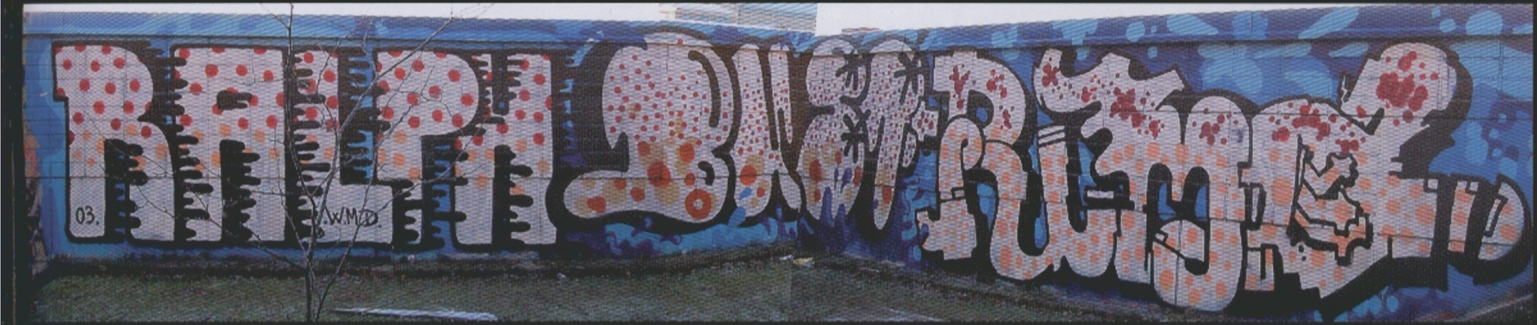
Dad, Lucy, Egf, Zufi, Die – 200



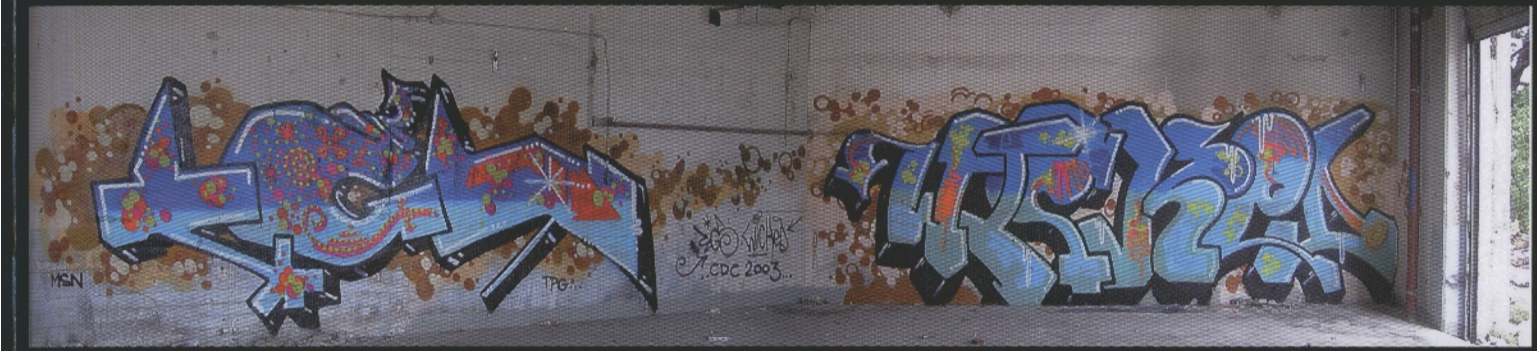
Egs, Sqar, Blok, Fers – 200



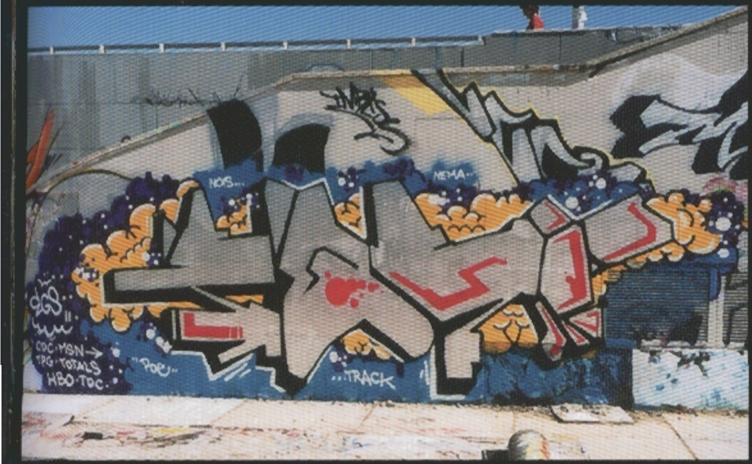
Galx, Egs, Fuse, Zufi – 2004



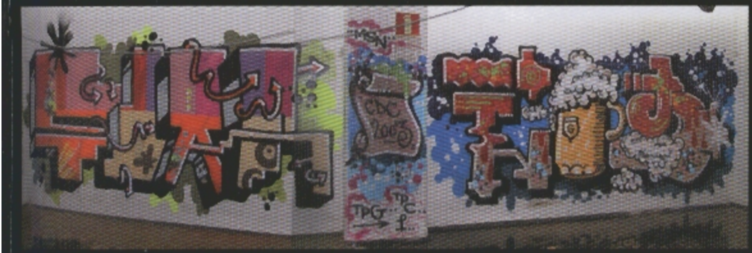
Ralph, Bust, Puma – 2003



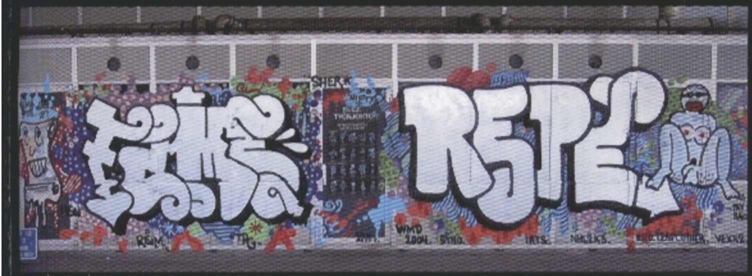
Egs, Wicked – 2003



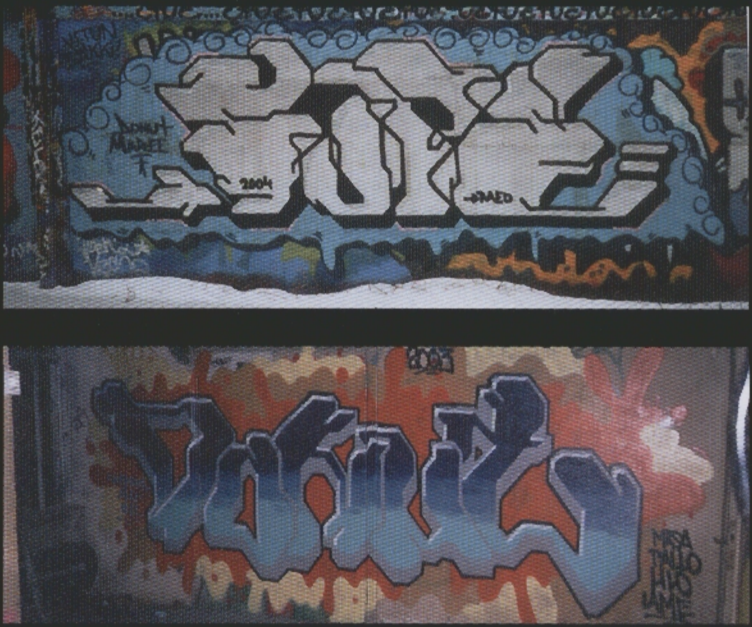
Egs – Sevilla, Spain



Sqar, Egs – 2003



Fame, Repe – 2004



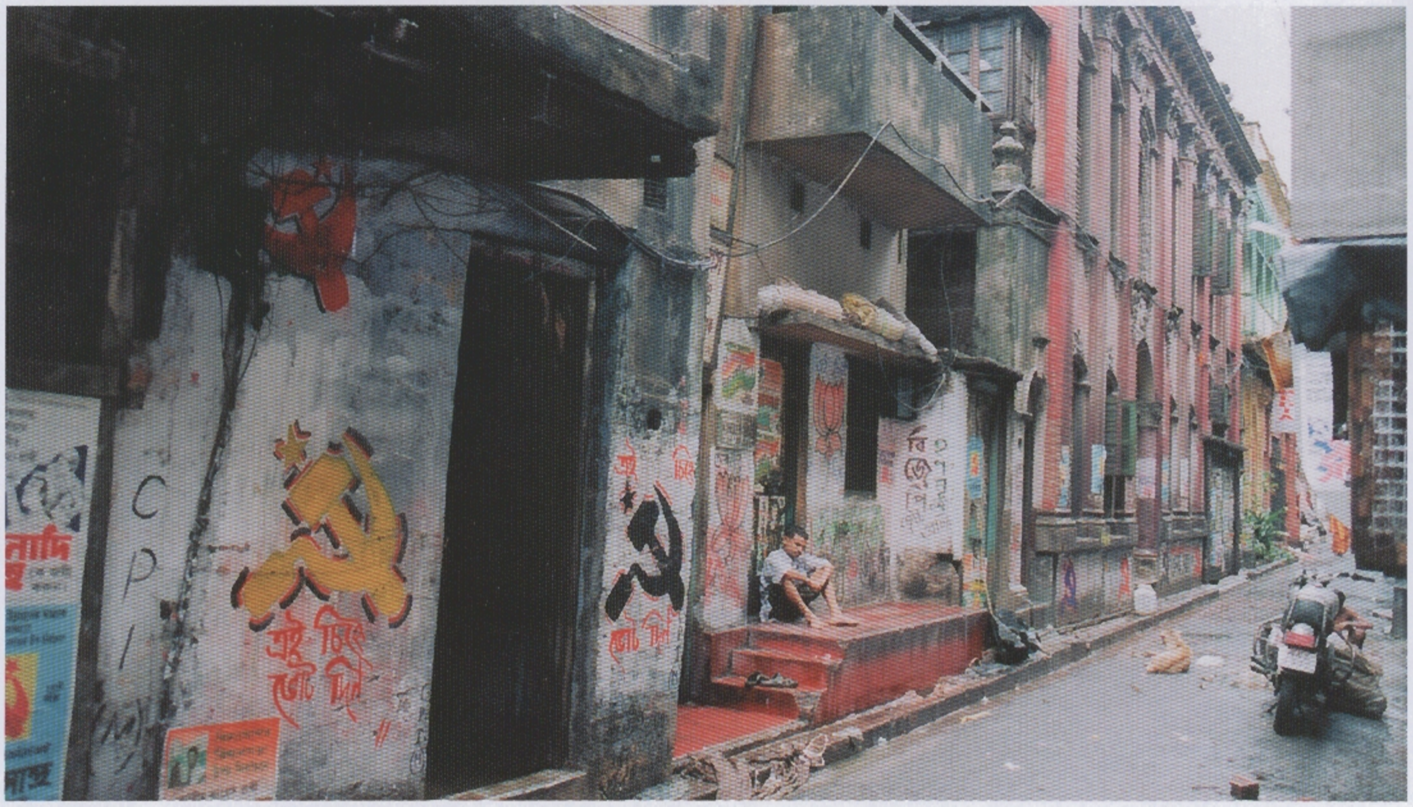
Both pieces by Donut – 2003

In memory of Vaasa Hall of Fame

Donut aka Yrjö is a writer from Vaasa, Finland. Donut has painted since 1999 and has created his style by using only straight lines. This is what he wrote us about his home town:

"The Vaasa Hall of Fame is the biggest legal hall of fame in Finland. It consists of the fences surrounding Vaasa's baseball stadium and during the last ten years writers from Helsinki, Turku, Stockholm and Berlin have visited. Two months ago Vaasa city council decided to illegalise the hall of fame. The city is now trying to get rid of graffiti after the increase of bombing and trainwriting. They are planning to hire Helsinki's "graffiti police forces", FPS here."

Donut, April 2004



Calcutta: Political parties can paint on your house or business if they wish: you have no say in such a matter without risking midnight action on your property of a more damaging fashion.

White shirts from brown water – painting in India

Delhi is a city of eighteen million, growing daily, and in the month of June it turns into pure hell. Temperatures hit a hundred and twenty degrees fahrenheit and the city buckles under its own weight, with frequent power cuts stilling every fan and air conditioner and making everyone very, very short with one another.

Not far from where I stayed in Delhi was a starving artist's colony, a small slum enclave of artists who had no steady employment and in some cases quite literally were starving. My friend Avnish had spoken with some of the residents and had drummed up considerable enthusiasm about my painting there. As I pulled off the main road, several men got into a fistfight over who would get to have their wall painted first. It was a bad sign.

প্রস্রাব
করা
নিষেধ

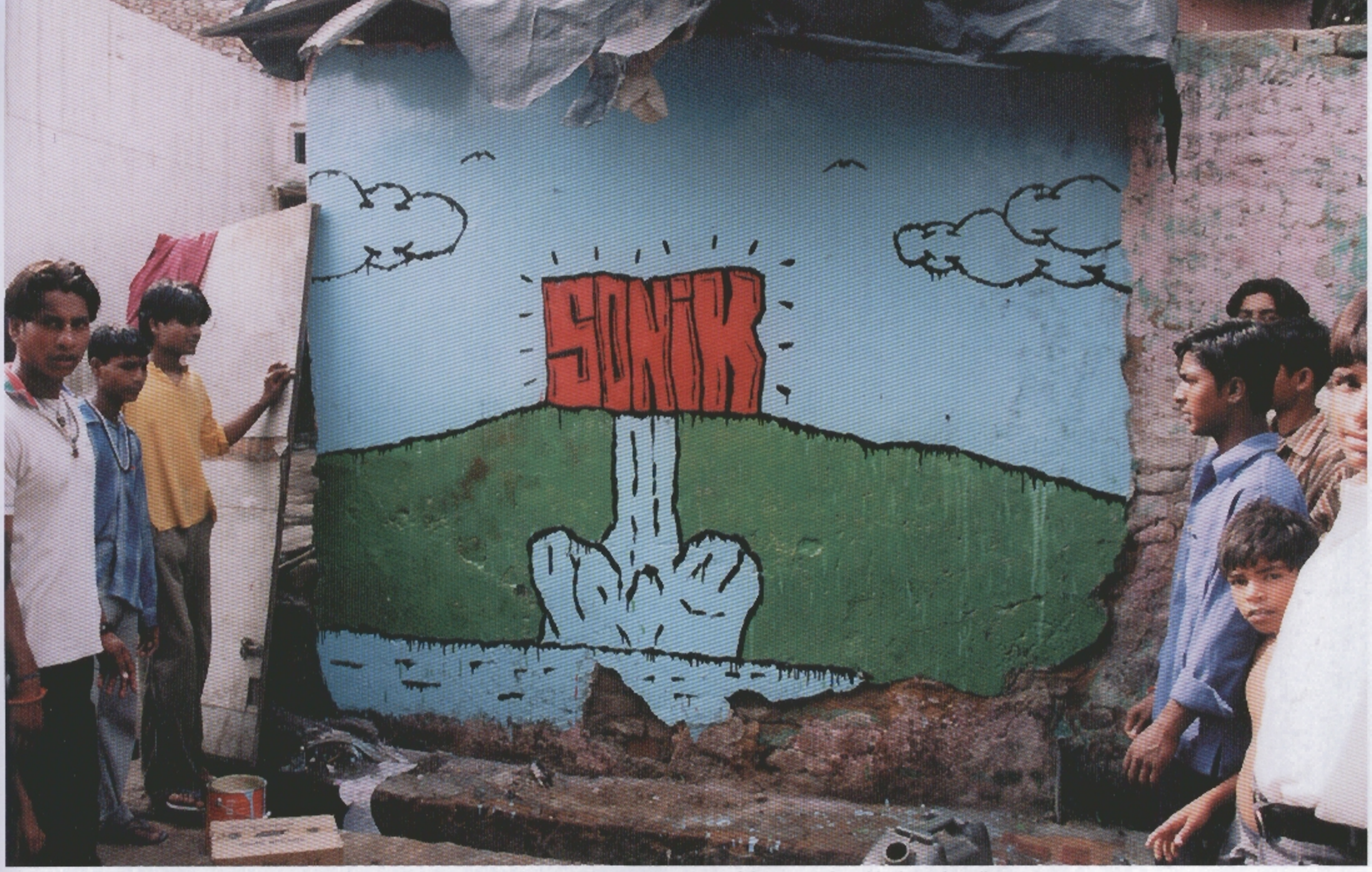
Calcutta

Delhi is absolutely not a walking city. It has broad avenues, the result of British urban planning in the early part of the Twentieth Century. At times these avenues have the feel of a big Texan city like Houston or Dallas; and in the government portion of New Delhi, they feel like Washington, D.C. Once one turns off these broad avenues and onto a side street, however, anything goes. The side street could turn out to be a leafy enclave of gigantic, walled estates, a middle-class neighborhood of terraced houses, or a slum.

I carried my bags of paint to the wall I was to paint. It was like walking into a Save The Children commercial. Dirt road with piles of waste. Ditches on either side of the narrow dirt road, brimming with human excrement. Houses consisting of a broken concrete wall and a collage of tarpaulins and corrugated metal. Little, naked children, everywhere, covered with open sores. People lying about, looking like ghosts and animals. Flies, more flies than ever, landing on everything, especially the sores of the naked children. It was seven in the morning and already a hundred degrees fahrenheit. The smell of excrement was absolutely overpowering. Certainly, there are worse places, but it was hard to imagine one.

I knelt down to open my cans of paint, and a crowd formed around me, a tight semi-circle of people, about half of which were naked children. Two beat cops came walking down the path. Police in India carry long nightsticks, called lathis. The police cleared a gap in crowd watching me by means of swinging these lathis. They hit the children. Hard. The police barked at me "What are you doing here?! What is going on?!"

The sick thing about travel in India for me was how much it rewarded me for bringing out the worst parts of myself. Sadly, the best option was for me to snarl back at the policemen with every bit of racial superiority that I could intone into my voice. They kept on, leaving crying children to rub their lathi marks.



Sonik's piece in Dehli. "Kids were beaten out of my path, beaten behind me, and beaten to get out of the way so I could take a photo."

The children huddled closer as I filled in my paint. Some of the teenagers who were watching me took up the role of my helpers, and started to beat back the crowd. They didn't have lathis, but they too hit the children to get them to step back. I painted faster after speaking harshly to the teenagers for hitting children. They kept going.

I was outlining, and a stocky, strong woman rushed out of the shanty whose wall I was painting. She ran toward a girl of about seven or eight years old who was holding an infant and watching me paint. Catching the girl with her left arm, the stocky woman proceeded to hit her, and the infant, full force, over and over and over. The little girl took the blows with the breathless, tearless expression of a tiny body in the shock of receiving a beating that would have hurt a body three times her size.

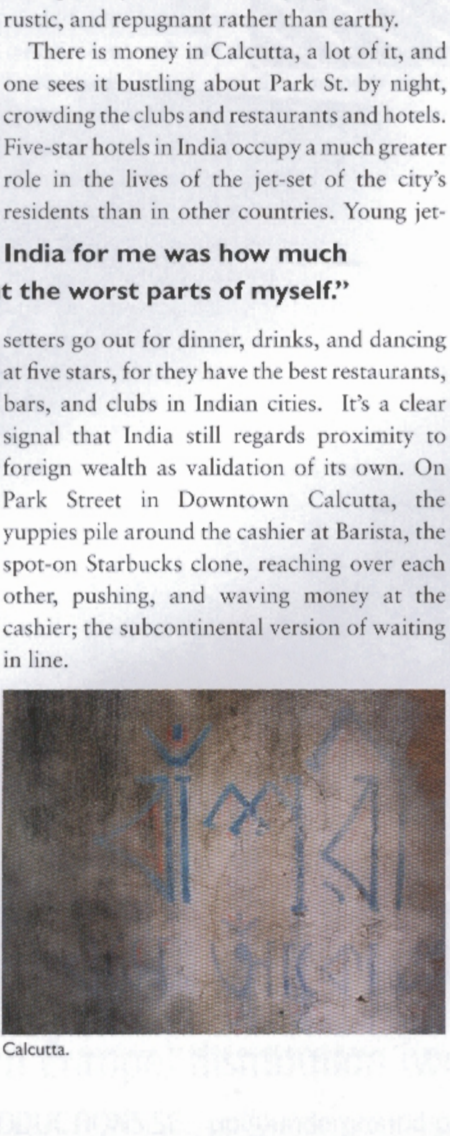
"The sick thing about travel in India for me was how much it rewarded me for bringing out the worst parts of myself."

I got out of there as fast as I could. Kids were beaten out of my path, beaten behind me, and beaten to get out of the way so I could take a photo.

Money

I trip over a man in front of the national museum on Chowringhee, the main drag of Calcutta. He is dark, shirtless, with six inch stumps for arms, lying on his chest with his face towards the busy sidewalk. He flaps his chickenwing arms on the blue tarpaulin scattered with coins from almsgivers and murmurs "aspki epake abskiki epskake" nonsense over and over. Rural poverty oftentimes is more acute, but it is only in tandem with the crush of urban assaults that such poverty becomes terrifying rather than rustic, and repugnant rather than earthy.

There is money in Calcutta, a lot of it, and one sees it bustling about Park St. by night, crowding the clubs and restaurants and hotels. Five-star hotels in India occupy a much greater role in the lives of the jet-set of the city's residents than in other countries. Young jet-setters go out for dinner, drinks, and dancing at five stars, for they have the best restaurants, bars, and clubs in Indian cities. It's a clear signal that India still regards proximity to foreign wealth as validation of its own. On Park Street in Downtown Calcutta, the yuppies pile around the cashier at Barista, the spot-on Starbucks clone, reaching over each other, pushing, and waving money at the cashier; the subcontinental version of waiting in line.

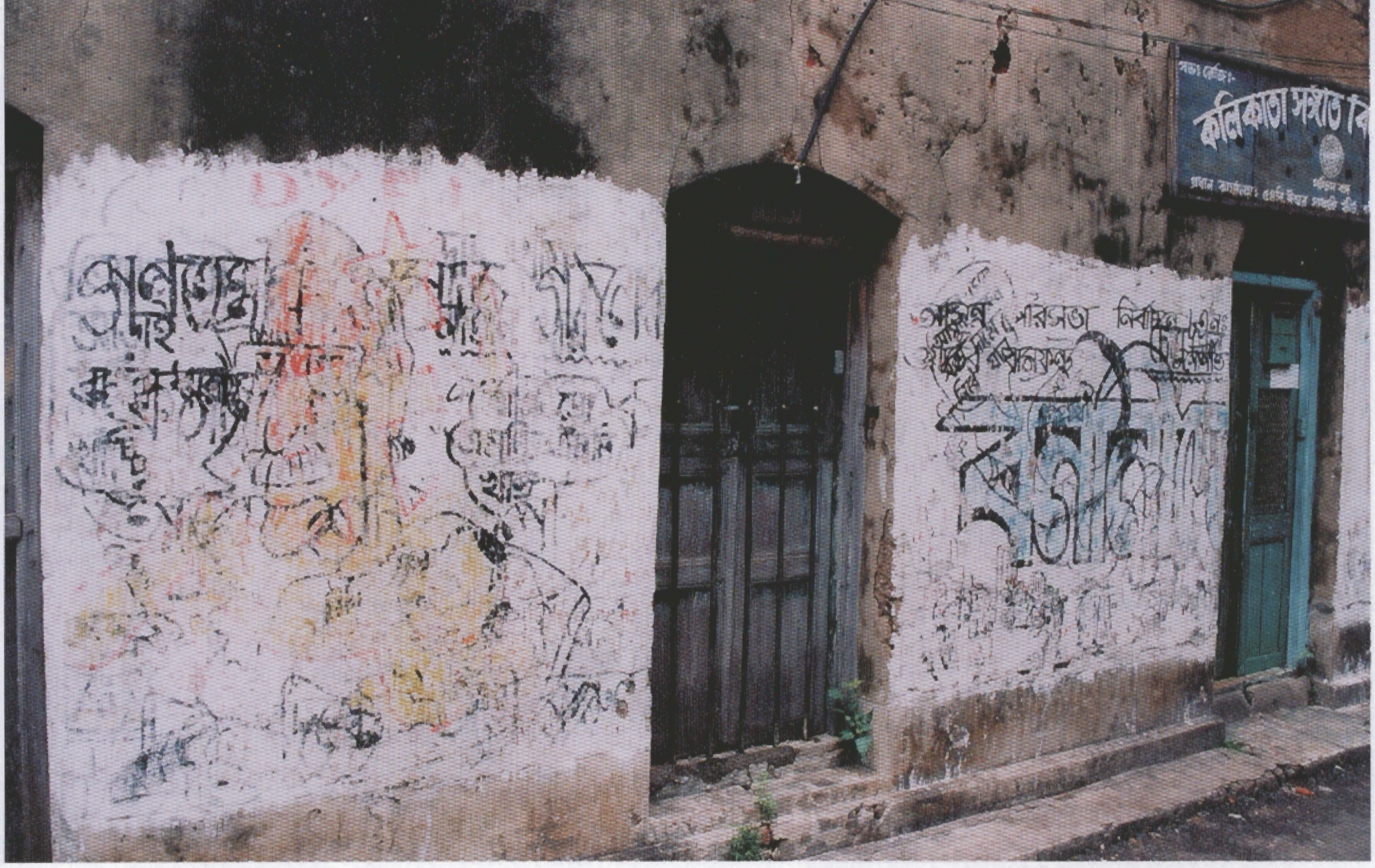


Calcutta.

Calcutta, The Hooghly River

A late-rising man at the Calcutta flower market slum crouches in a two foot high crawl space under his family's flower stall showroom floor, he is working a small stove to make tea; the floor above him is in early morning use. People laugh, make jokes. I hop about the path, seeking out the 10% of the ground surface not covered in muddy filth. I imagine myself in the man's place: no thoughts forward to table linen and a decent meal, no thoughts of a door to shut out the herd of people and wet air. I tremble at the thought of being ordinary, and yet, I kiss my teeth in the recognition of the obvious: these people are enjoying their days. Almost to a person, they are wearing clean clothes - astonishingly, remarkably clean, even pressed, bright despite

Calcutta.



Calcutta.

their inevitable washing in Calcutta's Hooghly River: a toilet, bathroom, disposal, crematorium, toxic waste removal, and all-purpose drain.

But in India the dhobis, the washerpeople, inevitably poor, can do a kind of magic, taking a dustily gray shirt, immersing it in brown river water, and pull it out again white as perfection. If such a magical act can be performed, maybe that awful brown river really is magical, sacred, and in possession of special powers. Maybe its magic is to make a life of poverty unthinkable in the West, not only possible but praise-worthy, endured but enjoyed.

It's a magic about which I can only guess. It must be magic. How else is all this possible?

Painting

Political graffiti saturates Calcutta to a degree unequaled elsewhere. It is everywhere that the phrase "stick no bills" is not. The *panchayat* (council) campaigns leave iconic hands, flowers, and hammers and sickles on everything. The hands are the symbols of the Congress Party, the party of Ghandi and Nehru. The flowers are for a splinter party of the Congress Party. The hammers and sickles are obvious. Due to widespread illiteracy, such recognizable party icons are important. Political parties can paint on your house or business if they wish: you have no say in such a matter without risking midnight action on your property of a more damaging fashion.

Walking the Calcutta thoroughfare of Park Street, I came upon a school with some half-finished student murals. I spoke with the kind and enthusiastic principal, and in and around the monsoon showers I got a mural done. Part of me wanted to paint things in the street that highlight and "call attention to" the difficult surroundings around me, but in Calcutta, that's shooting fish in a barrel, the kind of work that would look amazing in pictures, yet do no good in reality. Thus, I tried to produce an image of the utmost positivity. That's not so hard for me, but it was hard in Calcutta. I finished the painting, packed up my gear to leave, and as I passed through the gate, the beggars massed as twelve sets of dirty and infected hands alternately pawed me and fought off one another.

Text & photos: Caleb Neelon / SONIK

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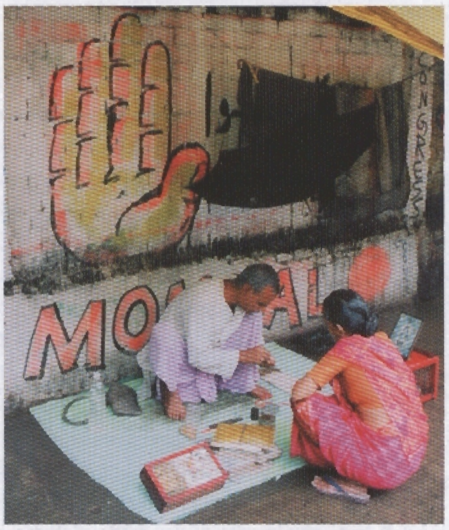
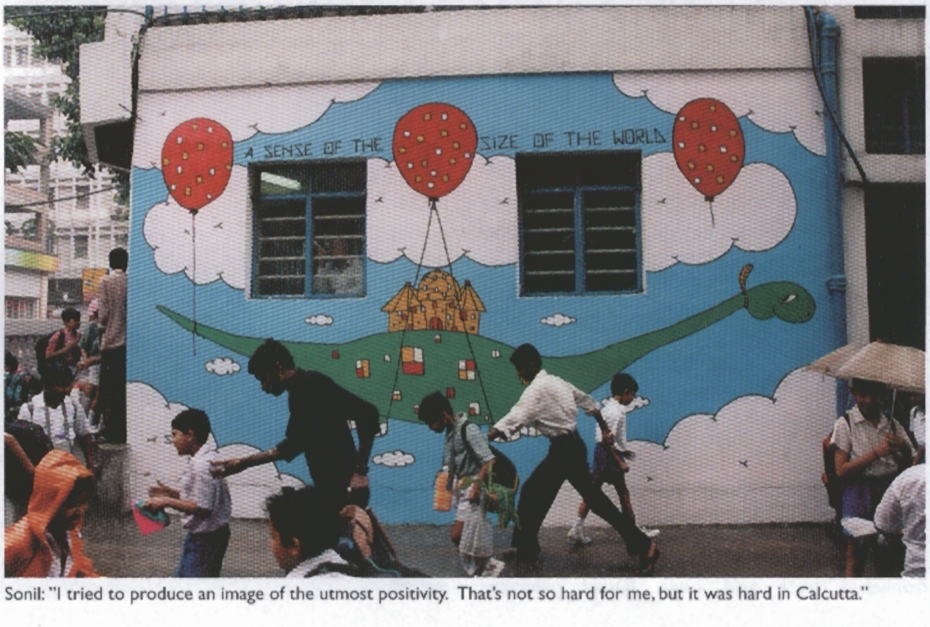


Astrologist in the streets of Calcutta.



Sonil: "I tried to produce an image of the utmost positivity. That's not so hard for me, but it was hard in Calcutta."

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Working at the exhibition The Art and The Police, Part Three.

The Professional Art Gangsters

In the last few years, discrete and simple chalk drawings have been appearing on the sidewalks and walls of Stockholm. They are made by a group that calls itself the *De professionella konstgangstrarna* – The Professional Art Gangsters. The Art Gangsters also make large mural paintings, and something they call observers, which are pipes that suddenly spring to life.

A conversation with the Professional Art Gangsters is not easy. They refuse to be categorized, since such things are silly and unnecessary. They can be as slippery as eels when you are trying to find out what they like or do. In other cases they are quite overt. The conversation touches as much on graffiti as on other forms of expression. They laugh a lot, but carefully and quietly, more as if to check that I have understood what they said.

The spring sun is warm, and in the sandpit next to us, punk rockers are listening to rap music, also eschewing categorization. DPKG's first exhibition, Art and Police Part Three, is taking place in a week's time, and I sense some tension in them.

Who is in the group?

DPKG consists of a number of people unknown to the public. Some of us paint, but we do other things, like exhibiting benches, for instance.

Tell me about that!

It's a plan against loneliness. We place yellow benches around the world, and you can sit on them if you want to talk to someone. It's an old idea of the **Fluxus** artist **Bengt af Klintberg**. We found it in a book, and wrote to him asking if it had ever come off. He told us it was just an idea he'd had. It was just waiting to be done! A lot of people think that the benches have something to do with dating, but that wasn't the original idea.

Where do you get the benches?

We relocate them. Some people may think of this as stealing, but we think these objects continue to spread joy in their new location.

What do you want to achieve?

We usually say that we work in order to allow the future to enter the world, and create things the way they really want to be. Everyone has a responsibility to develop things. If we hadn't done it, it wouldn't have happened. What you do is unique to every individual, or to a group. Regardless of what you do, even if you plagiarize what someone else does, you turn it into something of yours.

In pictorial art, plagiarism is taboo. But it is uninteresting to discuss biting. Of course people copy things. The same thing may just as well appear in different places. It would be interesting to recognize yourself in something someone else does in a completely different location. It feels as if all this chatter about biting is due to people being afraid.

Why did you start painting in public places?

We think we have a responsibility, a duty even, to make the environment more interesting. That's a duty in a good way. Places can provide inspiration, so you can't just accept that someone has decided how they should look. Everyone has the right to take their place. There's a world out there. Why accept boredom? Public space belongs to everybody.

Which places inspire you?

It varies. There are two kinds, the boring space that needs something new, and the one that is exciting and inspiring. They don't always need to have something added to them. But there are attractive surfaces and elements in the countryside too.

How long have you been doing this?

Quite a long time, but our means of expression can vary. One year we did a lot of film; last year we painted a lot.

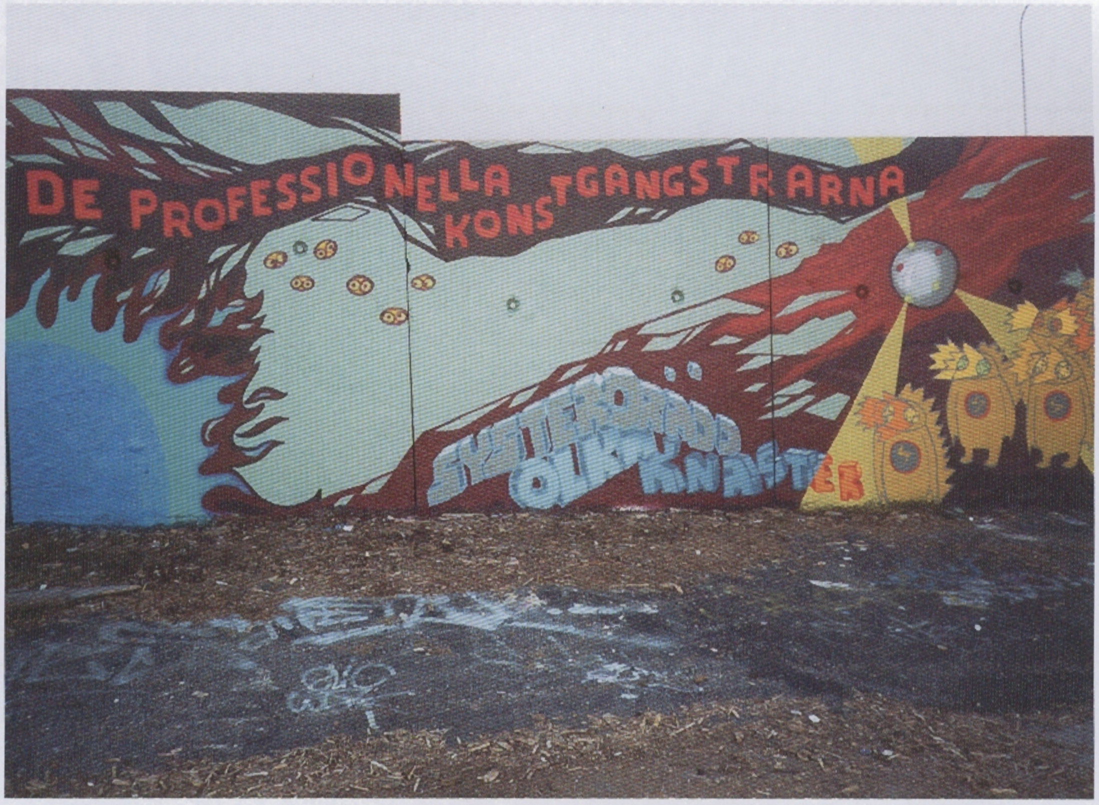
How do you paint?

We usually do a sketch together. Sometimes it appears spontaneously, and sometimes we've planned it beforehand. In such cases we usually have better materials. We are usually satisfied. We put so much energy into sketching, so the results are usually satisfactory, or better.

Observers

Observer

Observers



De Professionella Kontgangstrarna – Norrköping 2003

You use chalk when you paint on sidewalks?

Chalk is nice. Spray paint is completely different to work with. The spray can is considered to be dangerous; chalk is a little childish.

Have you ever bumped into the police?

They've stopped to talk to us on the odd occasion when we've done chalk drawings. Last time we were painting, someone stopped and asked us what we were doing. We said we were drawing, and when we didn't run away he shook his head in a shocked manner and left. He seemed to be thinking "How can they?"

Chalk is a medium which allows you to act freely. The police can't do anything about it, they said it was all right, or else they'd have to arrest all children who draw on sidewalks. "As long as you don't draw on the walls," they said. Perhaps this is because the rain washes chalk away. But it is apparently more dangerous to draw vertically.

Is there any drawback to working out of doors?

You have to adapt more to outer circumstances. Weather is important: rain, snow or 25 degrees below freezing aren't so good. The best thing to draw on is black, newly-laid asphalt.

What other forms do you work with?

Performance-like things. In the area where we live there is a long staircase, for instance. Last winter there were a lot of articles about how it hadn't been snow-plowed and sprinkled with sand. A lot of companies refused to take the blame for this, so we decided to own it, and inaugurated it with a cutting of the ribbon and everything. Then we helped old ladies across it. We had to improve on our image a bit.

Are you in any way linked to Hip Hop graffiti?

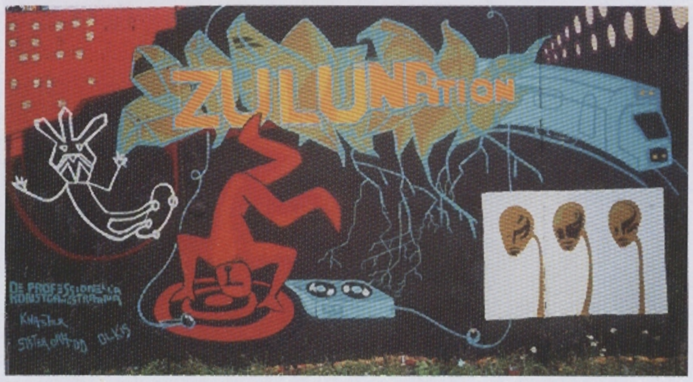
We've occasionally worked with graffiti writers. But we see no difference between graffiti and street art. That whole debate is a bit silly.

Is it important to be visible?

The observers we do, the pipes, they only make you happy because they are nice. With them, we probably don't think "oh, look, I did that" so much. But there's a mix, there's a bit of ego involved. Art is about making the inner picture visible in the outer world. That's satisfying.

Tobias Barenthin Lindblad

www.konstgangster.com



Zulu Nation – Norrköping 2003

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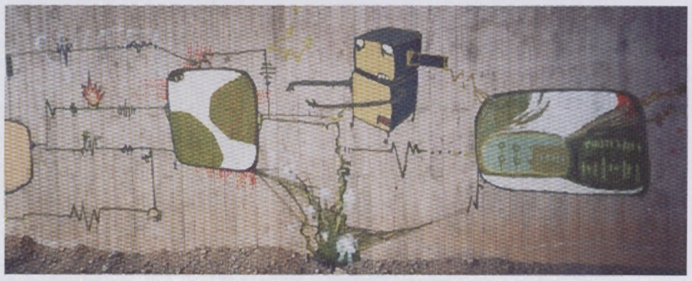
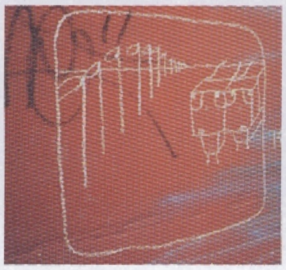
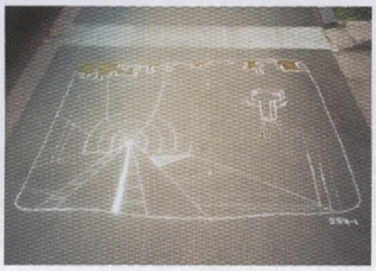


Drawing



Drawing with chalk



Drawing with chalk

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